The SPORTS PINK

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55p

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Terry Paine: why Saints will be a force to be reckoned with – P6

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COUNTDOWN to the CHAMPIONSHIP

Your in-depth guide to Saints' 2011/12 season

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

SAINTS 2011/12 FIXTURES

August
6 Leeds . . . . . .(H)
13 Barnsley . . . . . (A)
16 Ipswich . . . . . .(A)
20 Millwall . . . . . (H)
27 Leicester . . . . . .(A)

September
10 Nottm Forest . . . . . .(H)
17 Birmingham . . . . . .(H)
24 Burnley . . . . . (A)
27 Cardiff . . . . . (A)

October
1 Watford . . . . . (H)
15 Derby . . . . . (A)
18 West Ham . . . . . .(H)
22 Reading . . . . . (A)
29 Middlesbrough . . . . .(H)

November
1 Peterborough . . . . . (H)
5 Coventry . . . . . (A)
19 Brighton . . . . . (H)
26 Bristol City . . . . . (A)
29 Hull . . . . . (H)

December
3 Doncaster . . . . . (A)
10 Blackpool . . . . . (H)
17 Portsmouth . . . . . (A)
26 Crystal Palace . . . . . (H)
31 Bristol City . . . . . .(H)

January
2 Brighton . . . . . (A)
14 Nottm Forest . . . . . (A)
21 Leicester . . . . . (H)
31 Cardiff . . . . . .(H)

February
4 Birmingham . . . . . (A)
11 Burnley . . . . . .(H)
14 West Ham . . . . . (A)
18 Derby . . . . . (H)
25 Watford . . . . . (A)

March
3 Leeds . . . . . (A)
6 Ipswich . . . . . (H)
10 Barnsley . . . . . (H)
17 Millwall . . . . . (A)
20 Hull . . . . . (A)
24 Doncaster . . . . . .(H)
31 Blackpool . . . . . (A)

April
7 Portsmouth . . . . . (H)
9 Crystal Palace . . . . . .(A)
14 Reading . . . . . (H)
17 Peterborough . . . . . (A)
21 Middlesbrough . . . . . (A)
28 Coventry . . . . . .(H)

Simon Carter
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SPORTS EDITOR

Extra spring

LAST season Saints were a big fish in a small pond.

Along with Sheffield Wednesday, they were – by some distance – the biggest club in the third division.

They were able to average over 20,000 in a league where some of their rivals struggled to attract even a quarter of those attendances.

But that was last season.

Now, the pond is far bigger and there are some equally large fish swimming in there.

There are clubs Saints have rubbed shoulders with in the top flight numerous times – Leeds, West Ham, Birmingham, Forest, Leicester, Derby, Ipswich, Coventry, Middlesbrough.

Then there are the likes of Reading and Millwall, who are not as big as Saints but who finished in the top ten of the second tier last season.

Those sort of clubs cannot be written off as 'that's six points for us' – to do so would be to show an unwanted arrogance.

Even the lesser lights of the Championship – Barnsley, Doncaster – will pose numerous problems.

Picking three clubs to go down certainly isn't an easy prospect, not when former Premiership clubs like Crystal Palace and Coventry are tipped to struggle.

Proud background

I wrote when Saints went down to the third tier that it would not be a stroll in the park.

Anyone thinking it would be didn't know the lower divisions.

Though Saints got back up within two seasons – faster than the likes of Nottingham Forest and Leeds United managed in recent years – nobody can say it was easy.

Even after going on the second biggest spending spree in third division history – behind only Mohammad Al-Fayed's Fulham in the late 1990s – winning promotion was not as simplistic as some supporters probably imagined.

Being the big fish in the small pond brings its own pressures, that of everyone else treating you as their 'cup final'.

That won't be the case in the Championship – Saints are a big club with a proud Premiership background, of course they are, but so are many others.

And I will write the same thing I did two years ago – it won't be a stroll in the park for Saints in 2011/12 either.

The one difference is that many fans will know that too, com-

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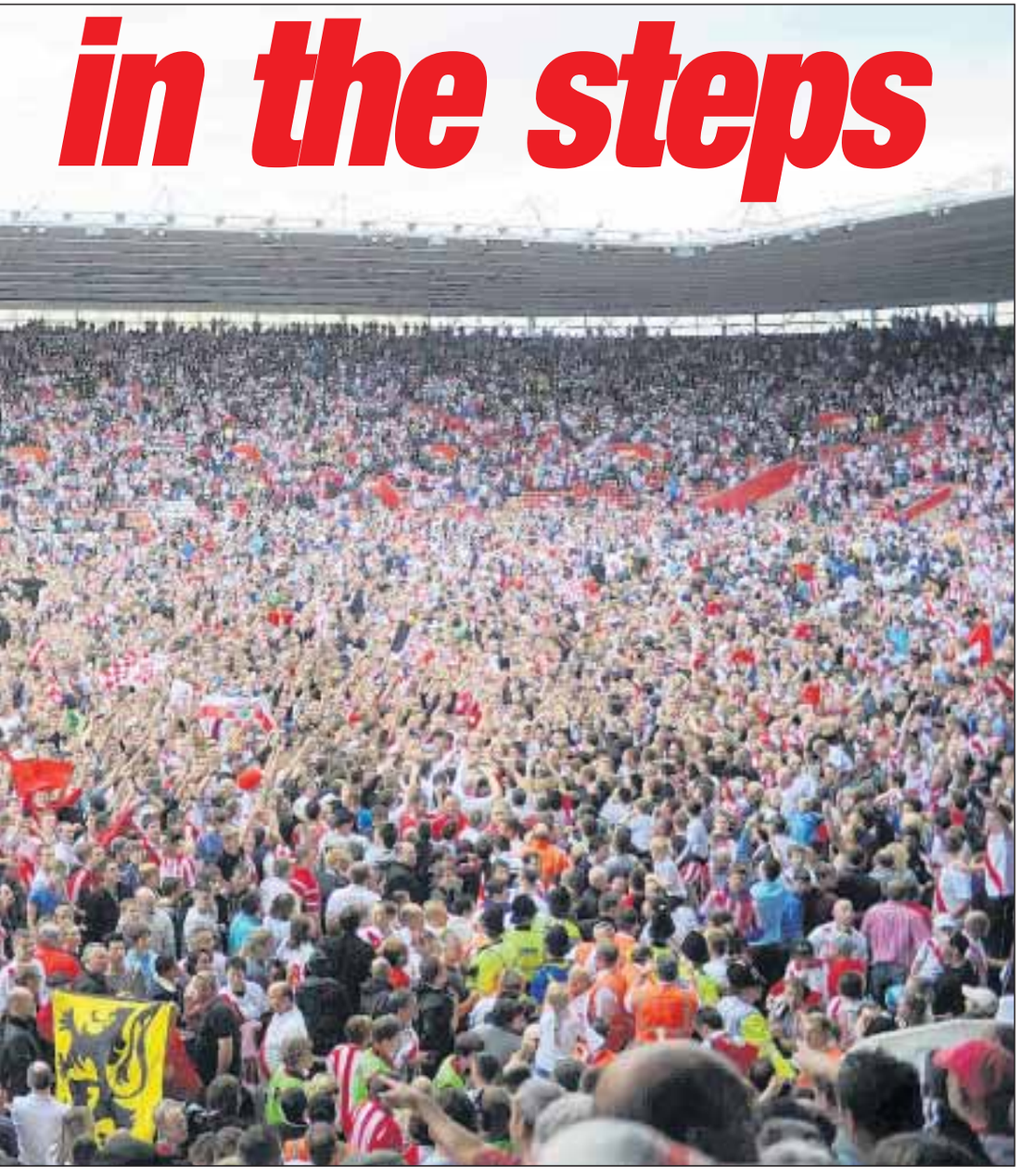
COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

in the steps



GREAT MEMORIES: Saints fans, left, and at St Mary's, above, celebrate promotion last May.

pared to this time two years ago.

Still, the days leading up to the start of any football season – whatever level your favourite club is playing at – are always ones for confidence.

If you could bottle that feeling of enthusiasm, you'd make a fortune.

Hope springs eternal, and all that.

And there should be an extra spring in the step of all Saints fans as they make their way into town for next weekend's curtain-raiser with Leeds.

The last two League One fixture lists have made sobering reading for supporters. For those who had grown up knowing nothing but top flight football and the elite of English football rolling up at The Dell at St Mary's, the sight of Yeovil, Rochdale, Hartlepool and Walsall in the opposing half of the pitch was hard to take.

While football fans are known for our eternal optimism and enthusiasm, it wasn't always easy for Saints fans to get themselves up for Wycombe and Stockport.

Not so this season.

I repeat the above-mentioned list ... Leeds, West Ham, Birmingham, Forest, Leicester, Derby, Ipswich ... these are the sort of games Saints fans have grown up with.

Then there's four south coast derbies against Pompey and Brighton, promising great atmospheres and more than a touch of spice.

Saints fans – to their great credit – continued to turn up during the two seasons in the third tier in their thousands.

Any club who can pull in over 30,000 for a league game in League One, as Saints did on a couple of occasions, doesn't really deserve to be there.

Still, that's where Saints were and, again, credit to them for taking only two seasons to start the journey back to where most of their supporters feel they rightly belong.

Now comes a totally different challenge for what is virtually the same squad as last season.

Massive feather

Norwich's back-to-back elevations has added a bit more pressure on Nigel Adkins.

And it wasn't as if there wasn't enough already.

Still, the Saints boss has previous Championship knowledge and experience.

Though he went down with Scunthorpe in 2007/08 – when he had Jack Cork on a season loan from Chelsea – he did keep The Iron up in 2009/10.

The scale of that achievement can't be under-estimated, and is a massive feather in Adkins' managerial cap.

Keeping Scunthorpe up in the Championship on crowds of under 6,000 underlines his management abilities more than taking an expensively-assembled Saints squad up from the third tier.

Taking Saints up from League One only told you that Adkins was a very good third division manager, but we knew that anyway as he'd previously taken Scunthorpe up twice on far less resources than he has at St Mary's.

What we don't know is how good he can be at the next level up, at a far bigger club.

That is why Nigel Adkins was brought to St Mary's, because Nicola Cortese wanted to find out.

We all do, and we all will in the next few, fascinating months.

FLASHBACK

Championship 2010-2011

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
QPR	46	24	16	6	71	32	88
Norwich	46	23	15	8	83	58	84
Swansea	46	24	8	14	69	42	80
Cardiff	46	23	11	12	76	54	80
Reading	46	20	17	9	77	51	77
Nottm Forest	46	20	15	11	69	50	75
Leeds	46	19	15	12	81	70	72
Burnley	46	18	14	14	65	61	68
Millwall	46	18	13	15	62	48	67
Leicester	46	19	10	17	76	71	67
Hull City	46	16	17	13	52	51	65
Middlesboro	46	17	11	18	68	68	62
Ipswich	46	18	8	20	62	68	62
Watford	46	16	13	17	77	71	61
Bristol City	46	17	9	20	62	65	60
Portsmouth	46	15	13	18	53	60	58
Barnsley	46	14	14	18	55	66	56
Coventry	46	14	13	19	54	58	55
Derby	46	13	10	23	58	71	49
Crystal Pal	46	12	12	22	44	69	48
Doncaster	46	11	15	20	55	81	48
Preston	46	10	12	24	54	79	42
Sheffield Utd	46	11	9	26	44	79	42
Scunthorpe	46	12	6	28	43	87	42

FLASHBACK: Alex Chamberlain is mobbed after sealing Saints' 2010/11 campaign with a goal against Walsall on the final day.

League One 2010-2011

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brighton	46	28	11	7	85	40	95
SAINTS	**46**	**28**	**8**	**10**	**86**	**38**	**92**
Huddersfield	46	25	12	9	77	48	87
Peterborough	46	23	10	13	106	75	79
MK Dons	46	23	8	15	67	60	77
Bournem'th	46	19	14	13	75	54	71
Leyton Orient	46	19	13	14	71	62	70
Exeter City	46	20	10	16	66	73	70
Rochdale	46	18	14	14	63	55	68
Colchester	46	16	14	16	57	63	62
Brentford	46	17	10	19	55	62	61
Carlisle	46	16	11	19	60	62	59
Charlton	46	15	14	17	62	66	59
Yeovil	46	16	11	19	56	66	59
Sheff Wed	46	16	10	20	67	67	58
Hartlepool	46	15	12	19	47	65	57
Oldham	46	13	17	16	53	60	56
Tranmere	46	15	11	20	53	60	56
Notts County	46	14	8	24	46	60	50
Walsall	46	12	12	22	56	75	48
Dagenham	46	12	11	23	52	70	47
Bristol Rovers	46	11	12	23	48	82	45
*Plymouth	46	15	7	24	51	74	42
Swindon	46	9	14	23	50	72	41

* 10 pts deducted

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Saints' opening day results 1980-2010

SAINTS lift the curtain on their Championship return next weekend having failed to win an opening day game since the last century.

Saints' last day one success was a 1-0 win at Gordon Strachan's Coventry in August 1999.

The last time Saints won at home on the first day of a league season was in 1988/89 when Paul Rideout, pictured, scored twice on his debut in a 4-0 Dell rout of West Ham.

1980/81: Saints 2 (Channon 2) Man City 0

1981/82: Nottingham Forest 2 (Francis 2) Saints 1 (Keegan)

1982/83: Coventry City 1 (Whitton) Saints 0

1983/84: Nottingham Forest 0 Saints 1 (Wallace)

1984/85: Sunderland 3 (Bennett, Venison, Proctor) Saints 1 (Armstrong)

1985/86: Saints 1 (Puckett) Newcastle United 1 (Beardsley)

1986/87: Saints 5 ((Clarke 3, Wallace, Homes) QPR 1 (Allen)

1987/88: Saints 2 (D Wallace 2) Manchester United 2 (Whiteside 2)

1988/89: Saints 4 (Rideout 2, Cockerill, Le Tissier) West Ham 0

1989/90: Saints 1 (Ruddock) Millwall 2 (Briley, Sheringham)

1990/91: Aston Villa 1 (Cascarino) Saints 1 (Le Tissier)

1991/92: Saints 2 (Shearer, Hall) Tottenham 3 (Lineker 2, Durie)

1992/93: Saints 0 Tottenham 0

1993/94: Saints 0 Everton 2 (Beagrie, Ebrell)

1994/95: Saints 1 (Banger) Blackburn 1 (Shearer)

1995/96: Saints 3 (Le Tissier 3) Nottingham Forest 4 (Cooper, Woan, Roy 2)

1996/97: Saints 0 Chelsea 0

1997/98: Saints 0 Bolton 1 (Blake)

1998/99: Saints 1 (Ostenstad) Liverpool 2 (Riedle, Owen)

1999/00: Coventry 0 Saints 1 (Ostenstad)

2000/01: Derby 2 (Strupar, Burton) Saints 2 (Kachloul 2)

2001/02: Leeds 2 (Bowyer, Smith) Saints 0

2002/03: Saints 0 Middlesbrough 0

2003/04: Leicester 2 (Dickov, Ferdinand) Saints 2 (Phillips, Beattie)

2004/05: Aston V 2 (Vassell, Cole) Saints 0

2005/06: Saints 0 Wolves 0

2006/07: Derby 2 (Johnson, Peschisolido) Saints 2 ((Bale, Wright-Phillips)

2007/08: Saints 1 (Saganowski) Crystal Palace 4 (Scowcroft 3, Morrison)

2008/09: Cardiff 2 (Thompson, Johnson) Saints 1 (McGoldrick)

2009/10: Saints 1 (Paterson) Millwall 1 (Abdou)

2010/11: Saints 0 Plymouth 1 (Summerfield)

New challenge

Adkins worked wonders in keeping Iron in second tier ... that won't be the case at St Mary's ...

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NIGEL Adkins has tasted both triumph and disaster in the Championship, but his challenge now is unlike anything he seen before.

The Saints boss had two seasons in the second tier of English football during his spell as manager of Scunthorpe, where he was promoted to manager from his post as the club's physio.

His first visit to the Championship ended with an instant relegation for the Iron in 2007/08 – the season Stern John's last-day goals against Sheffield United prevented Saints from joining him in demotion.

His second season, 2009/10, saw him keep them up against the odds and helped cement the reputation that so attracted Saints' executive chairman Nicola Cortese.

For all of that experience, though, it is not just some of the Saints players who are entering somewhat unchartered waters, but Adkins too.

Underdog mentality

With all due respect, Scunthorpe were always punching above their weight in the Championship with their small ground and crowds which rarely got above the 6,000 mark.

Adkins had worked wonders to twice get them out of League One, but to finish anywhere outside of the relegation zone in the league below the Premiership was a major achievement.

He clearly knew how to work that underdog mentality, how to get his players to perform under that kind of 'backs-to-the wall' pressure against sides in the Championship who should really have been better than them given their infinitely superior resources.

The fact that once he couldn't quite keep them up, but the second time he did, also shows he is a keen learner.

The expectations at Saints, though, mean this is quite a different test altogether now.

Adkins did well in taking the first step along that road last season.

He proved that he could manage a club with big expectations, with bigger name players than he was used to, earning bigger salaries and all that goes with that.

TOTALLY DIFFERENT CHALLENGE: Nigel Adkins with Jack Cork during Scunthorpe's 2007/08 Championship campaign.

Though the season was not the runaway league title success that everybody had hoped for, a highly acceptable failure of coming second place was more than enough to satisfy the very vast majority at St Mary's.

However, for Saints and the club's hierarchy, mere consolidation in the Championship will not be enough.

Saints have to prove they are upwardly mobile, that the Premier League is within touching distance rather than a distant dream.

Adkins has been done no favours by the success of Norwich.

Many have said that the Canaries have been used as something of a yardstick by Saints in the last couple of years.

The fact Saints finished further behind Norwich than they started in their first League One season – in terms of points, and allowing for the ten point deduction – was said to be one of the reasons Alan Pardew's tenure was not judged as big a success as it might have been.

Momentum

In many ways Norwich are a similar club – they were a big side in League One, they have top flight experience, a very loyal and solid fan base .

Arguably, their fanbase is even better given their continued excellent season ticket sales even during their slump.

They are a provincial club who are ambitious and now, under Paul Lambert, they have reached the heights of the Premier League.

They have not done it by going out and spending lots of money, rather through maintaining a good core of players and adding where necessary.

That they carried their momentum into the Championship to take them straight through that league and into the top flight has, no matter what anybody tells you, added a little pressure to Adkins.

If they can do it, why can't Saints?

That is the question that inevitably follows.

SAINTS NOSTALGIA WILL APPEAR IN THE SPORTS PINK REGULARLY IN

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

for Nigel ...

Well, the answer to that question is complex.

But football often doesn't allow for the variables in the equation, rather it demands an instant answer that you either can or cannot supply.

It is probably no surprise that Adkins appears to be largely going forward with the squad that took Saints up.

Financially, things look far tighter at the club since the sad passing of Markus Liebherr, whilst Adkins is obviously hoping that he can get the very best out of what he has.

One thing Adkins has not had to do in his career is sign 'big name' players.

Attracting them can be very hard work for any manager and that is clearly not the priority at this point, even if that is concerning some fans a little.

Instead, Adkins seems to taking a safe option – he is dealing in what he knows.

He knows he can handle the players he has got.

There is a comforting feeling there.

And he is in the best position to know whether they are going to be good enough for the upcoming campaign.

As ever, a large part of being a football boss is managing expectations, both of your chairman and your fans.

To expect Saints to have a tilt at promotion this season, despite the Norwich example, is highly optimistic.

But nobody will want to see a relegation scrap.

The expectation will be of a promotion push, though most sane people would accept that being in the race for the play-offs at the business end of the season would be about as far as you could realistically stretch your optimism.

But there are so many unknowns in terms of how the squad will perform at Championship level that you cannot be certain of anything – sink or swim.

Ultimately, it will all be laid at Adkins' door.

For the club's hierarchy mere consolidation will not be enough ...

With Scunthorpe he stepped into the Championship with utter certainty – the season was going to be a struggle, a fight to survive.

There would be good days and plenty of bad days, but he knew what to expect.

With Saints there is much more of the unknown, taking the same squad forward, plenty of whom have either never played at this level or have limited experience.

And yet, no matter how they start the season, the expectation to see progress, a clear vision that promotion can be achieved within a relatively short time frame, will not dissipate.

Make no mistake, it's not only the players who are going to be tested at the higher level but Adkins as well.

He is a thinker of the game and has no doubt pondered all this himself.

But even his mind will be tested by the challenges that await.

Did You Know?

Saints' top league scorers 1960-2011

RICKIE Lambert is aiming to join the likes of George O'Brien, Ron Davies, Mike Channon and Matt Le Tissier by finishing as Saints' top scorer three seasons running.

1960/61: George O'Brien	22
1961/62: George O'Brien	28
1962/63: George O'Brien	22
1963/64: Martin Chivers	21
1964/65: George O'Brien	32
1965/66: Martin Chivers	30
1966/67: Ron Davies	37
1967/68: Ron Davies	28
1968/69: Ron Davies	20
1969/70: Mike Channon	15
1970/71: Mike Channon	18
1971/72: Mike Channon	14
1972/73: Mike Channon	16
1973/74: Mike Channon	21
1974/75: Mike Channon	20
1975/76: Mike Channon	20
1976/77: Ted MacDougall	23
1977/78: Ted MacDougall	14
1978/79: Nick Holmes	8
1979/80: Phil Boyer	23
1980/81 Mike Channon	10
1981/82 Kevin Keegan	26
1982-83 Danny Wallace	12
1983-84 Steve Moran	21
1984-85 David Armstrong	10
1985-86 David Armstrong	10
1986-87 Colin Clarke	20
1987-88 Colin Clarke	16
1988-89 Rod Wallace	11
1989-90 Matt Le Tissier	20
1990-91 Matt Le Tissier	19
1991-92 Alan Shearer	13
1992-93 Matt Le Tissier	15
1993-94 Matt Le Tissier	25
1994-95 Matt Le Tissier	19
1995-96 Matt Le Tissier	7
1996-97 Mickey Evans	16
1997-98 Matt Le Tissier	11
1998-99 Matt Le Tissier	7
1999-00 Marian Pahars	13
2000-01 James Beattie	11
2001-02 Marian Pahars	14
2002-03 James Beattie	23
2003-04 James Beattie	14
2004/05 Peter Crouch	12
2005-06 Ricardo Fuller	9
2006-07 Grzegorz Rasiak	18
2007-08 Stern John	19
2008-09 David McGoldrick	12
2009-10 Rickie Lambert	30
2001/11 Rickie Lambert	21

2011/12 – DON'T MISS YOUR COPY EVERY WEEK

Did You Know

SAINTS' average attendance during last season's League One promotion-winning campaign was higher than every single top flight season from 1978-79 to 2000/01 inclusive.

Saints' average league crowds 1960-2011

1960-61:	18,665
1961-62:	13,772
1962-63:	15,252
1963-64:	17,229
1964-65:	17,122
1965-66:	18,920
1966-67:	25,526
1967-68:	24,665
1968-69:	22,504
1969-70:	22,901
1970-71:	22,274
1971-72:	21,203
1972-73:	18,120
1973-74:	21,129
1974-75:	15,893
1975-76:	17,647
1976-77:	18,714
1977-78:	21,152
1978-79:	20,505
1979-80:	21,328
1980-81	21,481
1981-82	21,835
1983-84	18,088
1984-85	18,033
1985-86	14,877
1986-87	14,949
1987-88	14,543
1988-89	15,590
1989-90	16,463
1990-91	15,413
1991-92	14,070
1992-93	15,382
1993-94	14,751
1994-95	14,685
1995-96	14,820
1996-97	15,099
1997-98	15,159
1998-99	15,140
1999-00	15,132
2000-01	15,115
2001-02	30,633
2002-03	30,680
2003-04	31,717
2004-05	30,610
2005-06	23,614
2006-07	23,556
2007-08	21,254
2008-09	17,858
2009/10	20,982
2010/11	22,160

Paine's World

The Saints legend's EXCLUSIVE column on all things football

SO ENCOURAGING

I AM backing Saints to be in the race to win promotion from the Championship this season.

Having flown over from South Africa for a while, I have been able to watch them twice this past week, in the Memorial Cup and against West Brom.

And what I have seen has been very encouraging, as we look ahead to the new campaign.

I really do think that Saints will be in the melting pot this year.

I wouldn't say they are favourites – not by any means – but they are one of about nine or ten teams with the ability to get out of this league.

The problem is that the Championship looks to be so competitive this year.

There are some strong looking teams that have come down from the Premier League, although most have lost important players, which might help the other sides out.

But Saints can definitely make an impact.

You can't read too much into the Memorial Cup, because that was a tournament that was more about preparation and fitness.

But I was still impressed with what I saw.

Saints were particularly good against what I consider to be a fairly poor Werder Bremen team.

I watched them quite a few times last season, and I always felt that Bilbao would be the ones to provide the stronger test.

That proved to be right, as the Spanish side looked very well organised, and it didn't surprise me that they won the trophy.

But Southampton finished strongly in their game against Bilbao, and the fitness and sharpness levels looked good.

It was nice to get a first-hand look at the boy down the right flank, Alex Chamberlain.

He showed in the Memorial Cup, and also against West Brom, that he's certainly got something there.

He did extremely well before getting injured on Wednesday, and was the only one that provided any real penetration in the first half.

His replacement, Steve De Ridder, caught my eye too.

He looked like a very good professional. He showed plenty of good habits and it looks like he understands what the wing role is all about.

I liked the drive that he showed every time he got the ball – he was always going right at the defenders.

Although it was only a short look at him, it certainly appears like he could be a good asset.

If they can keep hold of Chamberlain then having that sort of threat down both flanks would be a massive plus.

I also liked the look of Jack Cork in midfield.

He put in an efficient performance against West Brom, and he went from box-to-box well.

It always takes a little bit of time to bed in properly, but the new signings look to be adapting quickly.

Rickie Lambert will no doubt be asked to score a lot of goals this season, and he produced a cracking header on Wednesday night.

In fairness, he looked a little bit rusty and probably needs a bit more sharpening up.

But he should be fine by the time the Leeds game comes around next week.

I had the opportunity to meet Nigel Adkins too, and I was impressed with him.

He was an absolutely charming man and he knows what he wants.

They seem to have been really working on their passing, movement and retaining the ball under him, although I would like them to get it forward a bit quicker at times.

Just generally, the vibe around the club appears to be really positive right now.

I enjoyed being a part of the Memorial Cup, it was a good event.

It was especially nice to be asked to help present the trophy at the end of the day.

It's great that Southampton were able to attract two European sides of the calibre of Athletic Bilbao and Werder Bremen.

Bilbao finished sixth in La Liga last season and, although Bremen didn't do very well, they are still an established Bundesliga team.

The tournament was obviously held for a very special reason, and it was a nice tribute to the former owner, Markus Liebherr.

Looking at the lack of a crowd, though, a little bit of tweaking will need to be done to get more people in next time.

Supporters have had a lot of financial demands on them in the last few weeks, with season tickets and new shirts, as well as the start of the holidays.

So that certainly would have affected things.

But any time you run a tournament for the first time, there are always things that you have to look at changing in the future.

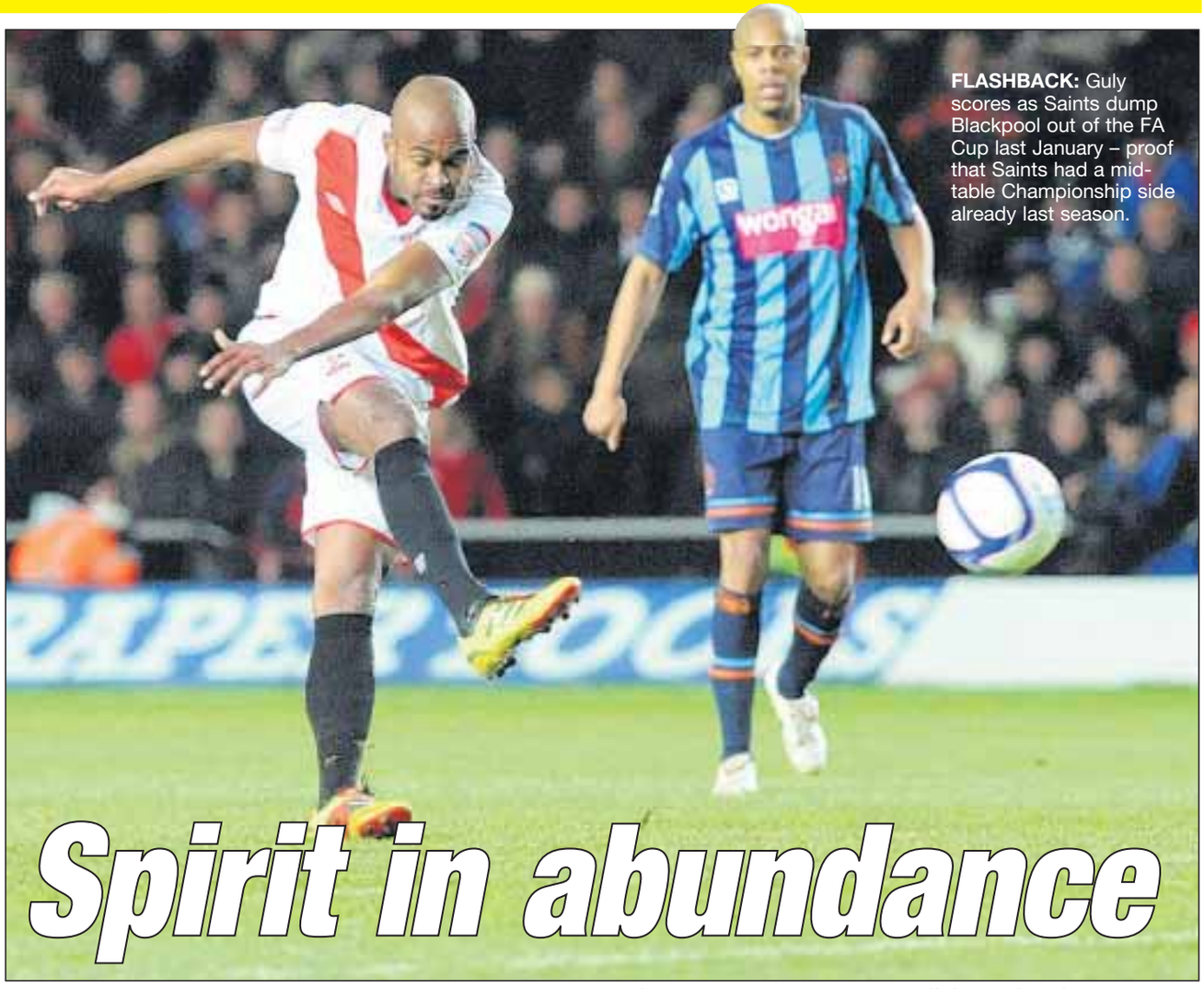
I had a good time on Wednesday night too, hosting a dinner in the Terry Paine suite at St Mary's.

There really seems to be a lot of positive thoughts coming from the club right now, which is important.

From what I've seen on the field, there is certainly enough to be getting quite excited about.

IMPRESSIVE START: Steve De Ridder.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP



FLASHBACK: Guly scores as Saints dump Blackpool out of the FA Cup last January – proof that Saints had a mid-table Championship side already last season.

Spirit in abundance

BEAUTIFUL SOUTH

BY DAREN WHEELER

IT'S one of the great ironies of football that you spend most of the summer wishing away the football-less months only to act all surprised when the new season finally arrives.

"I can't believe it's the new season already!"

Well, I can't believe the football season is with us already.

It seems like only yesterday I was on the pitch at St Mary's cheering at just about everything and everyone.

It seems like only yesterday that Saints were the form team in League One and were the team that everyone wanted to beat (but would never admit)

This season is a different kettle of fish.

This season we face a totally different challenge.

This season we're no longer red hot favourites to go up.

This season the likes of Leicester and West Ham are spending money like it's going out of fashion.

And with the likes of Saints not really spending that much, there are plenty of other teams that are rated more likely to go up.

This is the most competitive Championship in years and, with local derbies aplenty, the second tier is going to be the league to watch in 2011/12.

The pundits will tell you how the Premiership is going to be close and how, yet again, it's the best league in the world.

I'd counter that by saying that the only reason the Premiership will be close is that it will be contested by about five rather average teams, as it was last season.

Genuine class

If anyone really got excited by Manchester United last season then they need their head read.

Their grand final against Barcelona was embarrassingly one-sided and showed the whole world just poor the Premiership really is.

The Championship, on the other hand, is going to be contested by a group of strong teams.

It will be genuine class that wins the league rather than the other teams falling by the wayside in a grand game of last man standing.

So how will Saints fare?

Rickie Lambert pretty much hit the nail on the head when he stated that Saints will benefit from not being title favourites.

The expectation weighed heavily on our shoulders last season and it was only when the pressure was off that they gave glimpses of what was possible.

They could play some beautiful football and could tear teams apart… if the opposition let them.

SPOT ON: Rickie Lambert.

The problem we faced last season was that we were title favourites and every team we played seemed to shut up shop and played for a draw.

It made for a hard season and it was obvious that, coupled with the heavy expectation, weighed us down.

It all made life unnecessarily hard for us in League One.

This season the shackles are off and Saints will have a great deal more freedom.

Will we go up, either as champions, runners-up or through the play-offs?

It's genuinely too close to call.

There are some genuinely strong teams, all of which have a genuine chance of all three places.

According to my friend Dave Walker, we'll struggle this season and the lack of big name signings are a sign that we'll be mid table at best.

I disagree.

Last season we were already a mid-table Championship side.

We'd beaten a Premiership side (Blackpool) and had pushed Manchester United to the limit in the FA Cup, so the foundations were there to cope in the Championship.

Position of strength

In keeping the nucleus of the side that did so well last season, we're actually in a position of strength rather than weakness.

Leicester may well be spending ridiculous amounts of money but, as anyone who's seen a Sven-Goran Eriksson side will tell you, flinging money at the situation is no guarantee of success.

So where will Saints finish?

I'm putting my money on a play off place or thereabouts.

There are clubs that have spent big and you'd be hard pressed to argue against that sort of money buying success.

But you cannot buy team spirit and Saints appear to have that in abundance.

I'd wager that team spirit, coupled with the freedom of not being rampant favourites for promotion, will spur Saints on to a surprisingly successful season.

I'll steer away from singing this side's praises.

The last time I waxed lyrical about our chances I'd seen Jan Poortvliet's young side take part in a few very promising games early on and was convinced we'd be a force to be reckoned with in the Championship …

… And we all know how that ended up.

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Sam's side look strong

THE Championship is notoriously the hardest league to get promoted from and this season will probably be no different, ***writes ADAM LEITCH.***

West Ham's relegation from the top flight, and their subsequent recruitment, has made it clear they will be the team to beat.

Just signing players with top flight experience is no guarantee of success, particularly when they still have an unsettled squad as they aren't sure which stars will leave by the end of August.

But in bringing in Sam Allardyce, right, as manager, and the likes of Kevin Nolan and Matt Taylor, they should have enough to win the title.

Sven Goran Eriksson's approach at Leicester has been interesting.

To be signing mainly Football League players, and young English ones at that, may mean they need another reshuffle after promotion, but they should be a serious threat to get to that stage.

Of the promoted teams, Brighton might be the surprise package.

Logic says they should have a flying start as they take title winning confidence into the feelgood factor of a brand new stadium.

But in the long run, Saints should beat them to the Premier League.

There are few bad sides in the Championship.

Even those you expect to be languishing at the bottom have generally been in the league for a fair while and have a squad of experienced players who know what survival at this level is all about.

Peterborough might struggle without striker Craig Mackail-Smith, whilst it's probably two from about five or six to join them in relegation.

Coventry are the dark horses to get sucked in.

ADAM LEITCH'S CHAMPIONSHIP PREDICTIONS 2011/12

1 West Ham
2 Leicester

3 Birmingham
4 Reading
5 Leeds
6 Cardiff

7 Blackpool
8 Hull
9 Brighton
10 Ipswich
11 Millwall
12 Nottm Forest
13 Derby
14 Saints
15 Crystal Palace
16 Middlesbrough
17 Portsmouth
18 Burnley
19 Barnsley
20 Watford
21 Coventry

22 Bristol City
23 Doncaster
24 Peterborough

FLASHBACK: Ex-Saint Andrew Surman, far right, helps Norwich celebrate back to back promotions last May.

MID-TABLE OBSCURITY A SUCCESS

Adam Leitch
adam.leitch@dailyecho.co.uk
CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

CHAMPIONSHIP consolidation should be the target for Saints this season.

Though expectations, both in elements at the club and large sections of the fan base, are for a genuine Premier League promotion run this campaign, a season of mid-table obscurity would be a success.

For those who think that is far too unambitious, a few simple facts ...

Firstly, Saints' transfer dealings over the January transfer window and this summer have shown they do not have the lavish resources we might have thought they would have at this stage if you wind back a year.

They are going to largely go with the squad that got them promoted from League One, plus a few additions.

They will be stronger than last season but it will be largely the same bunch of players.

That is not saying that this group of players can't achieve promotion from the Championship.

But to expect them to instantly settle into a higher standard of football and brush aside all before them is a big ask.

The squad has been built with an eye to progressing through the levels, so there is an expectation that many of the current group will be good enough to get through the Championship.

But with many either having never experienced this level before, or having been away from it for some time, it is really taking a leap of faith to think that they won't need to readjust and consolidate before moving on.

Secondly, a lot of people contradict that by pointing to the example of Norwich.

The Canaries are a similar size of club to Saints and obviously did go through League One and straight up into the Premier League from the Championship.

There are two large differences, though.

When Norwich got promoted from League One they went up as champions – though Saints had a very good run at the end of the last campaign, you could argue the Canaries took forward a little more momentum than it feels as if Nigel Adkins' team will do.

Also, when people say it was largely the same Norwich squad, they forget that the Canaries made seven signings last summer having brought in four players the previous January.

They then followed that up with another three additions in the January window during their 2010/11 promotion campaign.

That is a total of 14 new players into the squad within a year which, as long as they are the right signings, would significantly boost, and indeed change, any team.

Fans will have to be patient as there will be sticky patches ...

Saints may have been a bit stronger than Norwich when they started out, but even so the comparisons do stutter a little.

We all think we know how Saints will react to their new level, yet nobody can be sure.

The start to the season is vital – Saints need to get off to a flyer.

If they don't a few doubts will start to surface and it could be a long season.

Unlike last term, Saints will not turn up to every game expected by everybody to win.

On some occasions the easing of that pressure may help them, but it will also mean the fans will have to be patient too as there will be some sticky patches.

With the step up in quality of opposition, Saints will probably go through a rough time at some point.

There probably will be a run of, say, four of five games where they won't get a win.

It's at that stage that we will really see the mettle of the side tested, and indeed the rest of the club too.

That's why it's important that that sticky patch doesn't come at the beginning of the season.

The nature of a league with a play-off format is such that it would be lovely were Saints in with a shout of reaching the top six with the last quarter of the season to go.

But equally nice would be if they had a campaign where they were never looking their shoulder.

Few people would complain if Saints sailed straight through the Championship.

But, realistically, a lower mid-table finish should be perfectly acceptable.

It might not sound ambitious but this is a club building for the future, and the best way to make that sustainable is constant yet steady progress.

Getting back to the promised land, and making sure you can stay there, is a marathon, not a sprint.

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Why Alex isn't to blame

ALEX CHAMBERLAIN

SAINTS legend Terry Paine posed an interesting question in last week's Sports Pink.

Talking about Alex Chamberlain and his desire to leave St Mary's, Paine wrote:

"The club are producing some outstanding players through their academy. But you have to ask when will they stop manufacturing them for other teams and start using them for themselves? Is the time now coming round where they might think twice about selling their young players?"

Paine's question is easy to answer.

Saints will "stop manufacturing them for other teams" when the club become one of the biggest in England.

Simon Carter
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SPORTS EDITOR

Until that scenario emerges, the footballing heirarchy simply won't change.

Some of Saints' best players wanted to leave for 'bigger' clubs when they were in the Premiership.

Dean Richards went to Tottenham, Wayne Bridge to Chelsea, James Beattie to Everton.

If that was the case, then Saints' best players are hardly going to stay when the club is in the second tier and Premiership big guns are sniffing.

Saints fans might not like it, but that is the reality of English football in the 21st century.

Rickie Lambert, Dean Hammond, Lee Barnard and Danny Seaborne were all playing in the same division as Saints two seasons ago, but they all jumped at the chance to move to St Mary's.

Why? Saints are a bigger club than Bristol Rovers, Colchester, Southend and Exeter and would no doubt pay far better wages. They offer a far better chance of progressing up the league ladder, and so it has been proved.

In the same way, the likes of Arsenal, Chelsea and Spurs are always going to be seen as a better bet than Southampton, and where Saints are in the league is an irrelevance.

Having said that, Chamberlain's interviews with two national newspapers did him absolutely no favours at all.

'I'm ready to play in the Premier League,' he claimed.

Really? With one full season of third division football behind him, he's 'ready' for one of the toughest leagues in the world?

There's nothing wrong with a bit of confidence, but let's introduce a sense of reality into all this.

Alex Chamberlain is potentially a very good player. If you're blessed with rapid pace, the top clubs are going to be interested, and if you're English in the current climate then even better.

But it's all potential, and playing well against Dagenham & Rebridge and Yeovil is all well and good, but it does not make you 'ready' for the Premiership.

It is easy to be sympathetic with Saints fans as they face up to possibly losing another youngster their coaching staff – at academy, reserve and first team level – have spent countless hours with at Staplewood.

Theo Walcott lasted half a season before he was tempted by the bright lights, and Gareth Bale a full season before he too moved to north London.

Saints – officials, players, fans – never wanted their top players to leave.

Rupert Lowe didn't want to lose Wayne Bridge, George Burley didn't want to lose Walcott and Bale, and Nigel Adkins will not want to lose Alex Chamberlain.

But if players want to move to a bigger club, and a club is willing to pay the asking price, then usually the player will get his wish.

Of course that is wrong. The power should lie with the clubs, not their employees.

But tell Carlos Tevez that. Tell Luca Modric that. Tell Alex Chamberlain that.

The late, great Alan Ball used to hate the increasing power that footballers had over those that paid their wages. He would launch into one of his passionate rants if asked for his views on the changing powerbase.

God knows what he would make of Tevez!

As Terry Paine rightly wrote last week, Chamberlain showed Saints a lack of respect in speaking out as he did.

His advisors probably thought it was the best way to bat themselves out of the corner they found themselves in – and the cricketing metaphor is apt as Chamberlain once scored a Hampshire League century as a 13-year-old!

A transfer request would have been a more sensible option, but there you go – at times, there is little sense shown in the rarified atmosphere of top level football, especially when it's cash-rich Premiership clubs we are talking about.

Lots of players that have come through the fantastic conveyor belt which is the Saints academy have left St Mary's in the last decade.

Almost all of them that have left for money have joined a bigger club or a club in a higher division – with the exceptions of Dexter Blackstock and Leon Best, who joined fellow Championship clubs QPR and Coventry respectively.

If Alex Chamberlain was seeking a move to Coventry City, you would be left scratching your head in amazement.

As it is, some of the biggest clubs in European football are apparently interested.

You cannot blame Chamberlain for wanting to leave, only the way he has been told to engineer such a move.

And as for the next starlets to come off the academy conveyor belt, if they're red-hot they too will be coveted by Premiership clubs – whether Saints are in the top flight or not.

That's not Saints' fault. That's because there are some very rich clubs who can buy virtually whoever they want.

If you want to blame anyone for that, blame those who created the Premiership, the marketing and rebranding exercise which pumped extra billions into the English game.

But then as Saints were part of the discussions that created the Premiership, you'll only end up partly blaming those who used to run the club in the early 1990s ….

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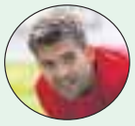
COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

SAINTS PEN PICTURES

KELVIN DAVIS

Goalkeeper
Age: 34 (Born Bedford, Sept 29, 1976)
Former clubs: Luton, Torquay, Hartlepool, Wimbledon, Ipswich, Sunderland
Joined Saints: July 2006 (From Sunderland, £1m)
Saints league apps: 206

BARTOSZ BIALKOWSKI

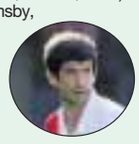


Goalkeeper
Age: 24 (Born Braniewo Poland, 6 July, 1987)
Former clubs: Gornik Zabre
Joined Saints: January 2006 (From Gornik Zabre)
Saints league apps: 21 (1)

TOMMY FORECAST

Goalkeeper
Age: 24 (Born 07 July, 1986)
Joined Saints: July 2008
Saints league apps: 0

DANNY BUTTERFIELD



Defender
Age: 31 (Born Boston, 21 Nov, 1979)
Former clubs: Grimsby, C Palace, Charlton
Joined Saints: July 2010 (Free)
Saints league apps: 32 (2)
League goals: 0

JOSE FONTE

Defender
Age: 27 (Born Panafiel, Portugal, 22 Dec, 1983)
Former clubs: Benfica, C Palace
Joined Saints: January 2010 (From Crystal Palace, £1.2m)
Saints league apps: 64
League goals: 7

DAN HARDING

Defender
Age: 27 (Born Gloucester, 23 Dec, 1983)
Former clubs: Brighton, Leeds, Ipswich, Southend, Reading
Joined Saints: July 2010 (free, from Ipswich)
Saints league apps: 77 (1)
League goals: 3

KELVIN DAVIS

Davis still one of the GOALKEEPERS

THE last time **KELVIN DAVIS** was in the Championship with Saints he was the virtually undisputed winner of the *Daily Echo Player of the Season* award.

He'll be hoping not to be as busy this time round.

That 2008/09 campaign was, of course, the one which saw Saints relegated to League One while in administration.

It was a pretty torrid time for the club, and probably made it hard for Davis to enjoy what was surely one of the best seasons of his life from a purely personal point of view.

Relegation hit Davis very hard.

But there was nothing more he personally could have done to prevent it.

In that campaign he was truly outstanding, often his contribution almost single-handedly kept Saints in games where they would have been dead and buried without him.

The last couple of seasons in the third tier have been very different for Davis – they've been a lot quieter.

The rebuilding of the side has meant he has played behind a much more frugal backline.

That means those Championship days of being severely tested so regularly have been put to one side.

In its place, though, has in many ways come more pressure for Davis to handle.

When you are being constantly battered, then you are in a mode of throwing yourself at everything and hoping for the best.

Nobody blames you if you do concede, and if you perform as brilliantly as Davis did then you a hero, even in defeat.

Lot of pressure

However, when you maybe only have a couple of saves to make a game, then there is a lot of focus on you and a lot of pressure.

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THE GOOD LEGACY

THE construction of the Saints squad has been logical as well as exciting.

Alright, that excitement may mainly have come a couple of years ago now when Alan Pardew was building the basis of the group of players which got Saints promoted and will be taking them into the Championship campaign.

But you cannot fault the way he went about it.

Pardew definitely built from the back and has left Saints, and by default Nigel Adkins, with a decent legacy.

The two players for every position mantra is one that far too many clubs shun these days.

Adam Leitch
adam.leitch@dailyecho.co.uk
CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

Some managers get obsessed with having a lot of players in one position – particularly the confidence departments such as the strikers.

And this can be at the cost of the backline, either in terms of numbers or settling for a lesser quality defensive signing to finance a better forward.

Nobody can accuse Saints of that.

They have two right backs plus a promising youngster, two left backs plus a promising youngster, and four centre halves.

It's a lovely balance that should provide sufficient cover in every role.

In terms of right back, the battle will be between **DANNY BUTTERFIELD** and **FRAZER RICHARDSON** once again.

Richardson was one of the big signings of last summer but after he got injured just days after joining he has always been playing catch-up.

It's probably fair to say we never really saw the best of him last season.

Having not had a proper pre-season under his belt, and being in the treatment room in a new club, and one where the manager who brought him in was sacked just weeks later,

BUTTERFIELD

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

best keepers around

Mistakes suddenly are blamed on you and that can dent your confidence – especially when you have plenty of time stood around in your area to contemplate it.

Davis certainly sees a lot less of the ball these days which makes his every touch, be it a save, coming for a cross, his distribution, or even just his communication, all the more examined.

He has stood up to it, though.

A few Saints fans have been critical of him for a perceived lack of concentration that leads to the occasional error, but they are being pretty harsh.

Davis was still the best keeper in League One and, if you're a Saints defender, you would feel pretty happy knowing he is behind you.

Make no mistake, Davis should be one of the best keepers in the Championship again as well – he is still that good.

Exacting standards

He demands exacting standards of himself, is a true professional, and that keeps him at the top of his game.

Competition for Davis comes from **BARTOSZ BIALKOWSKI** and **TOMMY FORECAST**.

Realistically, that competition is still Bialkowski as Forecast – still waiting for his competitive Saints debut after three seasons at St Mary's – remains very much the third choice keeper.

Bialkowski didn't get many opportunities last season, with Davis playing every minute of the league campaign, but during the cup appearances he did make he seemed better than when he had previously featured in 2009/10.

He looked a little more like his old self – that is, before his nasty injury when he had first broken into the team under George Burley in 2006.

The confidence seemed to be back, he even seemed a little more commanding which has been a criticism often laid at his door.

Bialkowski looks like he will provide good back-up this season.

And, for the first time in a while, he could provide genuine competition for the number one jersey should the unlikely happen and Davis' standards slip.

BIALKOWSKI

LEFT FOR ADKINS

KEY MAN: Jose Fonte celebrates promotion last season – he will again be Saints' main defensive hope on their return to the Championship.

DAN HARDING

must have been a disorientating experience.

However, this summer Richardson has been fighting fit, has that full pre-season under his belt and now is the time for him to kick on and seriously challenge Butterfield for the right back slot.

Whenever he got the jersey last season, Richardson ended up slipping out of the team again – but he has a lot to offer.

Butterfield, only signed after the injury to Richardson, was an unsung hero.

You know what you will get him – the former Crystal Palace man is a proven professional and very consistent.

From what we saw there is an interesting contrast between the two – probably even more so when they make the step up.

Though both are fairly rounded players, and to class them as one-trick ponies would be unfair, in a general sense Richardson seems to offer a more cavalier attacking full back option.

Butterfield is very disciplined and can provide all the defensive cover Saints need to allow Alex Chamberlain to rampage down the right.

Adkins' approach to selection in this position will be interesting – will he opt for consistency or pick horses for courses, chopping and changing depending on the opponent and whether the game is at home or away?

After these two there is also young **JACK STEPHENS**, who joined from Plymouth for £150,000 last spring, waiting in the wings.

There is a similar situation over at the left back slot.

RYAN DICKSON came in last summer from Brentford and many expected he would dislodge **DAN HARDING** in the team.

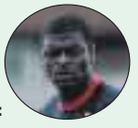
The only thing was people didn't reckon upon Harding raising his game so dramatically.

Harding had a superb season last time out and made the left

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

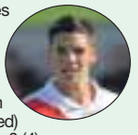
SAINTS PEN PICTURES

RADHI JAIDI



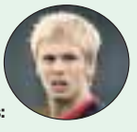
Defender
Age: 35 (Born Tunis, 30 Aug, 1975)
Former clubs: Esperance, Bolton, Birmingham
Joined Saints: September 2009 (free)
Saints league apps: 57 (1)
League goals: 4

AARON MARTIN



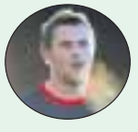
Defender
Age: 21 (Born Cowes IOW, 29 Sept, 1989)
Former clubs: Eastleigh
Joined Saints: September 09 (From Eastleigh, undisclosed)
Saints league apps: 6 (4)
League goals: 0

JOSEPH MILLS



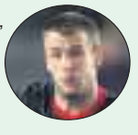
Defender
Age: 21 (Born 30 Oct, 1989)
Joined Saints: July 2008 (from trainee)
Saints league apps: 14 (12)
League goals: 0

FRAZER RICHARDSON



Defender
Age: 28 (Born Rotherham, 29 Oct, 1982)
Former clubs: Leeds, Charlton
Joined Saints: July 2010 (From Charlton, £400,000)
Saints league apps: 14 (7)
League goals: 0

DANNY SEABORNE



Defender
Age: 24 (Born 5 Mar, 1987)
Former clubs: Exeter, Taunton
Joined Saints: Jan 2010 (from Exeter, £200,000)
Saints league apps: 25 (15)
League goals: 0

BEN REEVES

Defender
Age: 19 (Born 19 Nov, 1991)
Joined Saints: (August 2010, from trainee)
Saints league apps: 0

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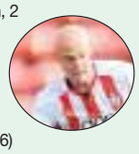
COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

DE RIDDER ADDS

SAINTS PEN PICTURES

RICHARD CHAPLOW



Midfielder
Age: 26 (Born Accrington, 2 Feb, 1985)
Former clubs: Burnley, West Brom, Preston
Joined Saints: January 2011 (From Preston, £50,000)
Saints league apps: 27 (6)
League goals: 4

RYAN DICKSON

Midfielder
Age: 24 (Born 14 Dec, 1986)
Former clubs: Plymouth, Torquay, Brentford
Joined Saints: June 2010 (£175,000, from Brentford)
Saints league apps: 15 (8)
League goals: 1

GULY DO PRADO

Midfielder
Age: 29 (Born Brazil, 31 Dec, 1981)
Former clubs: Perugia, Fiorentina, Cesena
Joined saints: Jan 2011 (From Cesena, undisclosed)
Saints league apps: 23 (11)
League goals: 9

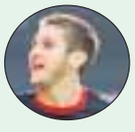
DEAN HAMMOND

Midfielder
Age: 28 (Born Sussex, 7 Mar, 1983)
Former clubs: Brighton, Aldershot, Leyton Orient, Colchester
Joined Saints: August 2009 (From Colchester, £400,000)
Saints lge apps: 80 (1)
League goals: 9

LEE HOLMES

Midfielder
Age: 24 (Born 24 Apr, 1987)
Former clubs: Derby, Swindon, Bradford, Walsall
Joined Saints: June 2008 (Free, from Derby)
Saint league apps: 13 (10)
League Goals: 0

ADAM LALLANA



Midfielder
Age: 23 (Born St Albans, 10 May, 1988)
Joined Saints: August 2010 (Trainee)
Saints league apps: 109 (17)
League goals: 25

TALISMANIC: Adam Lallana goes for goal against Hartlepool last season.

Veteran Radhi ready to go again

From Page 11

back slot his own.

Dickson started to make much more of an impact towards the end of the campaign, which brings him right into the reckoning for this one.

Dickson can also play left midfield but is unlikely to get ahead of Adam Lallana for that role, meaning he and Harding will probably be battling it out again.

There is also a slight contrast between the two, just like with the right backs, with Dickson probably a little more gung-ho and Harding a little more considered in his approach.

Behind these two is another promising youngster in the shape of **BEN REEVES** with **JOSEPH MILLS** looking like he will be on his way out.

In terms of the centre half position you imagine, injury, suspension or sudden loss of form permitting, it will be **JOSE FONTE** and one other.

Fonte was not only a class act last season but has recent Championship experience, with Crystal Palace, that will prove invaluable for Saints.

RADHI JAIDI was his regular partner last time out and it will be interesting to see how the veteran, pictured – 36 next month – shapes up against quicker and more skilful forwards who may be looking to play on his shoulder.

DAN SEABORNE has not been everybody's cup of tea since he joined from Exeter in January 2010.

But in fairness he is still a youngster, despite his experience in terms of games, and still learning his trade.

As a left footer, he provides a good foil for Fonte.

AARON MARTIN remains the dark horse.

Adkins had seemed to have a bit of a blind spot for him after the former Eastleigh youngster made rapid progress under Pardew.

But that appears to be changing.

Certainly an extended contract and a bigger role in pre-season suggests he is now very much in the manager's mind.

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

VALUABLE COVER

Adam Leitch
adam.leitch@dailyecho.co.uk
CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

IT'S quantity rather than quality that has been under the spotlight when it comes to the midfield department at Saints.

Nobody could possibly have disputed the quality of their first string midfield in League One.

And, though you can never be sure how players will fare when they make the step up, it looks as though it should be plenty good enough for the Championship.

However, cover in some positions, particularly the wide areas, has been thin on the ground.

ADAM LALLANA had another outstanding season on the left in 2010/11, not only contributing some handy goals but generally making the team tick.

Saints were fortunate that, though he had a few niggles, he was never out for long.

That was lucky because the stats show they could scarcely score a goal, let alone win a game, without him whilst they had very little cover for him.

Over on the right, after the early departure of **JASON PUNCHEON**, who seems certain to have left Saints permanently by the time the transfer window closes, it was all about **ALEX CHAMBERLAIN**.

The youngster set League One on fire last season with displays of pace, power and skill.

Seeing how he goes stepping up a level will be interesting.

Also, though he's had a few quiet games, he hasn't had the real dip in form that all youngsters often get after making the big breakthrough.

Maybe he is good enough not to suffer from it; maybe it will come this coming season.

Saints know they have to be prepared for that, and of course the possibility a club might just put in an offer big enough to tempt them to sell someone who appears to see his future away from St Mary's.

To Chamberlain's credit, he does seem level-headed enough not to sulk should he not move to the Premier League this summer.

But whatever, Saints cannot afford to be so thin on the ground next time out.

Step forward, then, **STEVE DE RIDDER**, the one million euro man

LEVEL-HEADED: Alex Chamberlain. Steve De Ridder (above)

MIDFIELDERS

who can play on either wing and who impressed as a sub on his debut against a West Brom XI in midweek.

At last some proper cover for the wide areas.

Saints do have another recognised wide man on their books in the shape of **LEE HOLMES**, who will hopefully get some games after another injury-ravaged campaign.

Holmes is primarily a left sided player but can be used on the right, as has been seen in pre-season.

After that, the wide areas become about square pegs in round holes.

There is the possibility of using the diamond midfield formation but that has enjoyed limited success, often working when switched to during a game but not being as effective once the initial surprise factor has worn off when starting a game with it.

But no team wants to change their shape based on personnel and so the likes of **GULY DO PRADO, JONATHAN FORTE** and **RICHARD CHAPLOW** have been employed out wide.

However, that is not the strongest position for any of them.

In the central areas Saints look even stronger than in 2010/11.

You would struggle to argue that **JACK CORK** replacing Huddersfield-bound Oscar Gobern has not improved the squad.

Saints fans know all about Cork after his loan spell at the club in 2008/09 and, for a youngster, he has vast experience of this level.

He will add some quality in the central areas that already looked fiercely competitive with **DEAN HAMMOND**, Chaplow and **MORGAN SCHNEIDERLIN** all vying for selection.

Just who Adkins will pick as his starting pair remains to be seen – at a guess, maybe Hammond and Cork.

There is also a decent balance in terms of the types of central midfielder Saints have.

Maybe you could argue they are still missing somebody to contribute a decent number of goals from that position.

But with such exceptional wide players in Lallana and Chamberlain, they will be hoping that is not a problem.

JACK CORK

SAINTS PEN PICTURES

ALEX CHAMBERLAIN

Midfielder
Age: 17 (Born 15 Aug, 1993)
Joined Saints: January 2010 (from trainee)
Saints league apps: 27 (9)
League goals: 9

JASON PUNCHEON

Midfielder
Age: 25 (Born Croydon, 26 Jun, 1986)
Former clubs: MK Dons, Barnet, Plymouth
Joined Saints: February 2010 (From Plymouth, £250,000)
Saints league apps: 34
League goals: 3

MORGAN SCHNEIDERLIN

Midfielder
Age: 21 (Born Zellwiller France, 08 Nov, 1989)
Former clubs: Strasbourg
Joined Saints: June 2008 (From Strasbourg £1.2 million)
Saints league appearances: 81 (13)
League goals: 1

JACK CORK

Midfielder
Age: 22 (Born, Carshalton, 25 Jun 1989)
Former clubs: Chelsea, Bournemouth, Scunthorpe, Watford, Coventry, Burnley
Joined Saints: July 2011 (From Chelsea, £750,000)
Saints league apps: 23
League goals: 0

LEE BARNARD

Forward
Age: 27 (Born Romford, 18 July, 1984)
Former clubs: Tottenham, Southend, Crewe, Leyton Orient, Stevenage, Northampton, Exeter
Joined Saints: January 2010 (From Southend, £175,000)
Saints league apps: 38 (18)
League goals: 23

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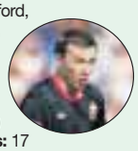
COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

SAINTS PEN PICTURES

DAVID CONNOLLY



Forward
Age: 34 (Born Willesden, 6 June, 1977)
Former clubs: Watford, Feyenoord, Wolves, MK Dons, West Ham, Leicester, Wigan, Sunderland
Joined Saints: October 2009 (Free)
Saints league apps: 17 (18)
League goals: 8

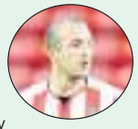
JONATHAN FORTE

Forward
Age: 25 (Born, Sheffield, 25 July, 1986)
Former clubs: Sheffield Utd, Doncaster, Rotherham, Scunthorpe, Notts County
Joined Saints: January 2011 (From Scunthorpe, undisclosed)
Saints league apps: 2 (8)
League goals: 2

RICKIE LAMBERT

Forward
Age: 29 (Born Liverpool, Feb 16, 1982)
Former clubs: Blackpool, Macclesfield, Stockport, Rochdale, Bristol R
Joined Saints: August 2009 (From Bristol R, £1m)
Saints league appearances: 89 (1)
League goals: 51

STEVE DE RIDDER



Forward
Age: 24 (Born, Ghent, 25 Feb 1987)
Former clubs: De Graafschap
Joined Saints: July 2011
Saints league apps: 0

RYAN DOBLE

Forward
Age: 20 (Born, 1 Feb 1991)
Joined Saints: July 2010 (from trainee)
Saints lge apps: 0

Connolly could

MAVERICK: Guly Do Prado. Below – Rickie Lambert, right.

Adam Leitch
adam.leitch@dailyecho.co.uk
CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

GOALS win games, so strikers make teams, is how the logic goes.

And for Saints fans one of the biggest talking points this summer is how their forwards will adapt to life in the Championship.

It is a little bit of an unknown quantity and nowhere more than in the forward department does an inability to perform against better quality players become apparent.

That's because strikers are always judged by how many goals they score and, if you struggle, you don't hit the net as often.

It's a pretty brutal reality and one that Saints supporters and players will be hoping is not an issue.

Much of the talk amongst Saints fans has been surrounding **RICKIE LAMBERT.**

He remains the talisman for the team, the hero for the current generation.

Lambert is the man who delivers in front of goal.

He was spectacular in his first season – 36 goals in all competitions in 2009/10 – had a slow start last time out but got going and helped fire Saints towards promotion.

In the end, Lambert still managed 21 League One goals.

Away from his scoring feats, many people failed to appreciate just how rounded a player he was becoming last season.

His contribution to the team was absolutely invaluable.

Lambert to Saints is not just about his goals, as he is a focal point for the way in which they play.

That's why how he adapts to the Championship is so vital for Saints.

If Lambert was in his early or mid 20s then people probably wouldn't be asking too many questions.

However, he will turn 30 during the coming season. And to be moving up to that level for

DAVID CONNOLLY

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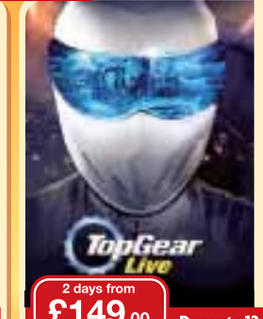

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COUNTDOWN

be a key ...

STRIKERS

the first time, at what for a striker is a relatively late stage of your career, means there is no certainty.

What you do know is that Lambert will give you a presence up there, no matter what.

Expecting him to be as prolific in front of goal is a lot of pressure and perhaps optimistic – other than his unnerving accuracy from the penalty spot, that is.

But it shouldn't really change the way he plays as long as he has the belief within himself that he belongs in the Championship.

That he can prove to the managers who considered buying him for that level, and walked away, that they were wrong.

Generally at Saints over the past couple of seasons it has been a matter of who partners Lambert.

That is likely to remain the case, at least for the start of the season. But again, it is all about how the others adapt to the Championship.

LEE BARNARD had to play second fiddle for some of last season but looks ready to make the step up, even though he too has never played in the second tier.

DAVID CONNOLLY, the one man who has experience of a far higher level than the Championship, looks fit and sharp.

He could be key for Saints – a real star man – if he can manage runs of games.

Nobody is ever totally sure what you will get from **GULY DO PRADO**.

His game will probably be unaffected by the step up – you will get moments of brilliance and moments of frustration with him.

JONATHAN FORTE contributed two vital goals against MK Dons in the space of a few minutes, but has otherwise found himself on the outside looking in since joining in January.

However, he does have searing pace, something massively lacking elsewhere in the Saints front line and which counts for far more as you step a level.

Then there is young **RYAN DOBLE** still battling for first team recognition.

Perhaps the anxiety of Saints fans can best be summed up by reflecting that the club do not have a current, proven Championship goalscorer in their ranks.

But they do have plenty who might yet make the grade, or in Connolly's case prove they still have what it takes.

AVERAGE ATTENDANCES 2010/11

Championship

	Highest	Lowest	Av
Leeds United	33,622	20,747	27,299
Derby County	33,010	23,159	25,892
Norwich City	26,532	23,852	25,386
Leicester City	30,919	19,611	23,709
Nottm Forest	29,490	19,411	23,274
Cardiff City	26,058	20,573	23,193
Hull City	24,110	19,714	21,168
Sheffield United	23,720	17,496	20,632
Ipswich Town	29,258	16,728	19,614
Reading	23,677	14,029	17,681
Middlesbroguh	23,550	13,712	16,377
Coventry City	28,184	12,292	16,309
Portsmouth	20,040	13,132	15,707
QPR	18,234	12,046	15,635
Swansea City	19,309	12,411	15,507
Crystal Palace	20,142	12,353	15,351
Burnley	20,453	13,655	14,930
Bristol City	18,308	13,376	14,604
Watford	15,538	10,620	13,108
Millwall	16,724	8,937	12,438
Barnsley	20,309	10,250	11,855
Preston	18,417	8,994	11,767
Doncaster	14,313	7,921	10,258

League One

	Highest	Lowest	Av
Saints	**31,653**	**17,857**	**22,160**
Sheffield Wed	23,081	14,797	17,817
Charlton	24,767	12,797	15,582
Huddersfield	17,024	11,462	12,728
Plymouth	14,347	4,960	8,613
MK Dons	11,857	6,469	8,512
Swindon Town	11,087	6,912	8,457
Brighton	8,416	6,474	7,351
Bournemouth	10,008	5,501	7,103
Notts County	11,355	4,041	6,586
Peterborough	10,116	4,233	6,449
Bristol Rovers	8,340	4,829	6,253
Tranmere	12,249	4,110	5,474
Exeter City	7,869	3,456	5,393
Carlisle	7,412	3,354	5,207
Brentford	7,015	3,795	5,172
Leyton Orient	7,714	2,963	4,581
Oldham	8,564	3,056	4,392
Yeovil Town	6,281	3,331	4,291
Colchester	6,523	2,892	4,246
Walsall	6,387	3,019	4,033
Rochdale	6,483	2,019	3,486
Hartlepool	4,084	2,289	2,933
Dagenham & R	4,446	1,907	2,769

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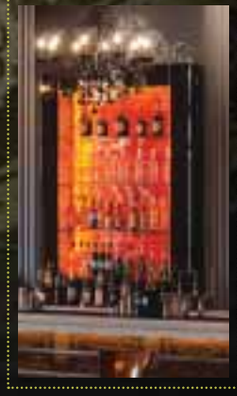

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

I've every confidence in Saints

TICK FOLLOWS tock follows tick follows tock.

The summer lull has teased and tortured many a supporter as the nation's footballing fraternity is forced to go cold turkey once again, ***writes DAN KERINS.***

But now we're there.

Back in stripes, Saints are finally about to re-emerge stage left to the Championship.

England's second tier may not be the bright lights of Broadway that many crave in the form of the Premier League, but it gives Nigel Adkins' men the opportunity to be rediscovered as a sizeable force in the game.

Of course, unlike the last two years, we're no longer one of the big boys on the block.

There are plenty of teams in what used to be known as Division Two whose lofty ambitions match or even exceed our own.

Sven Goran-Eriksson's Leicester, for example are very serious about getting out of the second tier.

Splashing £5m on former Saints defender Matt Mills shows how serious they are, and acts as a reminder to Saints that this is a world away from League One.

It would appear the Championship has become the oft-talked about Premier League Two.

Big teams with big players make up this division. Kevin Nolan, Shane Long, Matt Taylor, Liam Lawrence, Michael Johnson – all players that would be able to command a place many top flight teams.

Saints have their work cut out.

But that's not to say Southampton are being left behind.

It would be stupid to give a definitive appraisal after a 50-minute friendly appearance, but Steve De Ridder has certainly turned a few heads on the wing and sounds a decent prospect for the coming season.

With Puncheon being left out in the cold and Alex Chamberlain angling for a move, an extra winger could still be needed however.

Meanwhile, we all know about Jack Cork and the assured, classy performances he can bring to the table.

His signing is a shrewd bit of business and makes the central midfield place in Adkins' side ultra competitive, for Schneiderlin, Chaplow and Hammond.

The problem facing the squad is a depth in certain positions.

The front four – Lambert, Connolly, Barnard and Guly – were fantastic at League One level, but with the exception of Connolly – whose talent seems to defy his growing years – it a unit untested at this level.

I have confidence the forwards will be able to deliver in the Championship, but the unknown should always be a concern.

We probably still need an extra central defender as a long term replacement for Jaidi, but beyond that the squad seems capable of competing in this league.

Notions of 'doing a Norwich' are fanciful, but a mid-table finish should be the minimum aim – with one important caveat.

We must beat Portsmouth.

This is the game we all looked for the moment the fixtures came out.

This is our chance to reassert ourselves again as the top club on the south coast.

If League One Saints were capable of hammering Premier League Pompey for 60 minutes before succumbing to the pace of players they couldn't afford, the prospect now we're on an even keel is mouthwatering.

Reassert our dominance and provide a platform to move on up.

That is the goal for the season.

I have every confidence Saints can achieve it.

NEW SIGNINGS: Steve De Ridder and Jack Cork at St Mary's for the friendly with a West Brom XI earlier this week.

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Stoke City	10th
Bolton	14th
West Brom	21st
1993/94	**1994/95**
*Reading	2nd
Port Vale	17th
Burnley	22nd (R)
1994/95	**1995/96**
Birmingham City	15th
Huddersfield Town	8th
1995/96	**1996/97**
Swindon Town	19th
Oxford United	17th
Bradford City	21st
1996/97	**1997/98**
Bury	17th
Stockport	8th
Crewe	11th
1997/98	**1998/99**
Watford	**5th**
Bristol City	24th
Grimsby	11th
1998/99	**1999/00**
Fulham	9th
Walsall	22nd
Manchester City	**2nd**
1999/00	**2000/01**
Preston	4th
Burnley	7th
Gillingham	13th
2000/01	**20001/02**
Millwall	4th
Rotherham Utd	21st
Wasall	18th
2001/02	**2002/03**
Brighton	23rd (R)
Reading	4th
Stoke City	21st
2002/03	**2003/04**
Wigan	7th
Crewe	18th
Cardiff City	16th
2003/04	**2004/05**
Plymouth	17th
QPR	11th
Brighton	20th
2004/05	**2005/06**
Luton	10th
Hull City	18th
Sheff Wed	19th
2005/06	**2006/07**
Southend	22nd
Colchester	10th
Barnsley	20th
2006/07	**2007/08**
Scunthorpe	23rd
Bristol City	4th
Blackpool	19th
2007/08	**2008/09**
Swansea	8th
Nottingham Forrest	19th
Doncaster Rovers	12th
2008/09	**2009/10**
Leicester City	5th
Peterborough	24th (R)
Scunthorpe Utd	20th
2009/10	**2010/11**
Norwich City	**2nd**
Leeds United	7th
Millwall	9th

Promoted clubs in bold

* Did not go up as only the champions went up that season and Reading lost in the play-off final to Bolton.

NORWICH'S achievement of back-to-back promotions has raised some Saints fans' hopes that their club can do the same.

But as these statistics show, the Canaries are very much the exception to the rule when it comes to following promotion from the third tier with another elevation 12 months later.

Indeed, Paul Lambert's men were only the third club to produce such a feat since the top flight was rebranded as the Premiership almost 20 years ago.

Graham Tayor's Watford achieved it in 1998/99 – going up via the play-offs – and Joe Royle's Manchester City did the same 12 months later. In City's case they followed third tier play-off victory in 1999 with a second place finish in May 2000.

Clubs are just as likely to go back down as they are to go straight up again – three have suffered relegation since the start of the 1993/94 campaign.

PAUL LAMBERT

YEOVIL v SAINTS – TURN TO PAGES 20/21

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

History against Hammers

RELEGATED

90/91 ..... 91/92
Sunderland 18th
Derby County 3rd

91/92 ..... 92/93
Luton Town 20th
Notts County 17th
West Ham United 2nd

92/93 ..... 93/94
Crystal Palace 1st
Middlesbrough 9th
Nottingham Forest 2nd

93/94 ..... 94/95
Sheffield United 8th
Oldham Athletic 14th
Swindon Town 21st

94/95 ..... 95/96
Crystal Palace 3rd
Norwich City 16th
Leicester City 5th
Ipswich Town 7th

95/96 ..... 96/97
Manchester City 14th
QPR 9th
Bolton Wanderers 1st

96/97 ..... 97/98
Sunderland 3rd
Middlesbrough 2nd

WEST Ham are strongly tipped to win promotion back to the Premiership in 2011/12.

But recent history shows there is only about a one in four chance (28 per cent) of them doing just that.

Going back to the start of the 1990s, only 17 times out of 60 has a relegated team immediately won promotion back to the top flight.

And three of them – Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Nottingham Forest – all did it in the same season, 1997/98.

Four times this Millennium have none of the three relegated clubs won promotion 12 months later.

They included Saints, Norwich and Crystal Palace in 2005/06.

West Ham are aiming to emulate Manchester City (2001/02), Sunderland (2006/07) and Newcastle (2009/10) who all won the Championship title 12 months after relegation.

DAVID CONNOLLY: His goals helped Sunderland win the Championship title in 2006/07.

Nottingham Forest 1st

97/98 ..... 98/99
Bolton Wanderers 6th
Barnsley 13th
Crystal Palace 14th

98/99 ..... 99/00
Charlton Athletic 1st
Blackburn Rovers 11th

Nottingham Forest 14th

99/00 ..... 00/01
Wimbledon 8th
Sheffield Wednesday ...17th
Watford 9th

00/01 ..... 01/02
Manchester City 1st
Coventry City 11th

Bradford City 15th

01/02 ..... 02/03
Ipswich Town 7th
Derby County 18th
Leicester City 2nd

02/03 ..... 03/04
West Ham United 4th
WBA 2nd

Sunderland 3rd

03/04 ..... 04/05
Leicester City 15th
Leeds United 14th
Wolves 9th

04/05 ..... 05/06
Crystal Palace 6th
Norwich City 9th
SAINTS 12th

05/06 ..... 06/07
Birmingham City 2nd
WBA 4th
Sunderland 1st

06/07 ..... 07/08
Sheffield United 9th
Charlton Athletic 11th
Watford 6th

07/08 ..... 08/09
Reading 4th
Birmingham City 2nd
Derby County 18th

08/09 ..... 09/10
Newcastle United 1st
Middlesbrough 11th
WBA 2nd

09/10 ..... 10/11
Burnley 8th
Hull City 11th
Portsmouth 16th

THE new Championship season kicks off next Friday night with Hull's home clash against Blackpool.

AUGUST FIXTURES

Friday, Aug 5: Hull v Blackpool, 19:45

Saturday, Aug 6: Coventry v Leicester (12:30pm), Brighton v Doncaster, Bristol City v Ipswich, Burnley v Watford, Derby v Birmingham, Middlesbrough v Portsmouth, Nott'm Forest v Barnsley, Peterborough v Crystal Palace, Reading v Millwall, **Saints v Leeds (5.20pm).**

Sunday, Aug 7: West Ham v Cardiff (1pm).

Saturday, Aug 13:
Barnsley v Saints, Birmingham v Coventry, Crystal Palace v Burnley, Doncaster v West Ham, Ipswich v Hull, Leeds v Middlesbrough, Leicester v Reading, Millwall v Nott'm Forest, Portsmouth v Brighton, Watford v Derby.

Sunday, Aug 14: Blackpool v Peterborough, Cardiff v Bristol City.

Tuesday, Aug 16: Barnsley v Middlesbrough, Crystal Palace v Coventry, Doncaster v Nott'm Forest, **Ipswich v Saints,** Leeds v Hull, Portsmouth v Reading, Watford v West Ham.

Wednesday, Aug 17: Cardiff v Brighton, Leicester v Bristol City, Millwall v Peterborough, Blackpool v Derby.

Saturday, Aug 20: Brighton v Blackpool, Bristol City v Portsmouth, Burnley v Cardiff, Coventry v Watford, Derby v Doncaster, Hull v Crystal Palace, Nott'm Forest v Leicester, Reading v Barnsley, **Saints v Millwall**, Peterborough v Ipswich (5.20pm).

Sunday, Aug 21: West Ham v Leeds, Middlesbrough v Birmingham.

Saturday, Aug 27: Brighton v Peterborough, Crystal Palace v Blackpool, Derby v Burnley, Doncaster v Bristol City, Hull v Reading, Ipswich v Leeds, **Leicester v Saints**, Middlesbrough v Coventry, Millwall v Barnsley, Portsmouth v Cardiff.

Sunday, Aug 28: Nott'm Forest v West Ham, Watford v Birmingham.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Football Stats

SAINTS ace Rickie Lambert is conspicuous by his absence from leading bookmakers' odds to finish as the 2011/12 Championship Golden Boot.

Paddy Power
Carlton Cole (W Ham) 12/1
Shane Long (Reading) 12/1
David Nugent (Leicester) 16/1
Nicky Maynard (Bristol C) 16/1
Kenny Miller (Cardiff) 16/1
Fredrick Piquionne (W Ham) 16/1

Bet 365
Shane Long (Reading) 9/1
Nicky Maynard (Bristol C) 10/1
D J Campbell (Blackpool) 14/1
Carlton Cole (W Ham) 14/1
David Nugent (Leicester) 14/1
Michael Chopra (Ipswich) 16/1
Craig Mackail-Smith (Brighton) 16/1
Marlon King (Birmingham) 16/1

Blue Square
Carlton Cole (W Ham) 8/1
Shane Long (Reading) 10/1
David Nugent (Leicester) 11/1
Nicky Maynard (Bristol C) 12/1
Fredrick Piquionne (W Ham) 12/1
D J Campbell (Blackpool) 14/1
Kenny Miller (Cardiff) 14/1
Craig Mackail-Smith (Brighton) 14/1

Ladbrokes
Nicky Maynard (Bristol C) 10/1
Shane Long (Reading) 10/1
Marlon King (Birmingham) 12/1
Kevin Nolan (W Ham) 12/1
Kenny Miller (Cardiff) 12/1
Billy Sharp (Doncaster) 14/1

Fascinating times for Sven ..

Adam Leitch
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CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

THERE are not too many clubs holding back when it comes to making their ambitions for the coming season pretty clear.

The Championship looks like being just as tough to get out of – in an upward sense at least – this coming season as ever.

With Birmingham, Blackpool and West Ham coming down to replace the promoted sides of QPR, Norwich and Swansea, and Brighton, Saints and Peterborough coming up in place of Scunthorpe, Sheffield United and Preston, it is going to be competitive.

Add to the that the spending by some clubs and you can already see how tough it's going to be.

Led the way

Leicester have led the way in the summer spree stakes and have made some good additions.

Sven-Goran Eriksson, the highest profile manager in the division, is clearly ready for a title assault. However, his signings have not been quite what you might expect.

While West Ham have been the ones who have recruited big names with Premier League pedigree – Kevin Nolan, Abdoulaye Faye and Matt Taylor – Sven has gone about things in a slightly more circumspect manner.

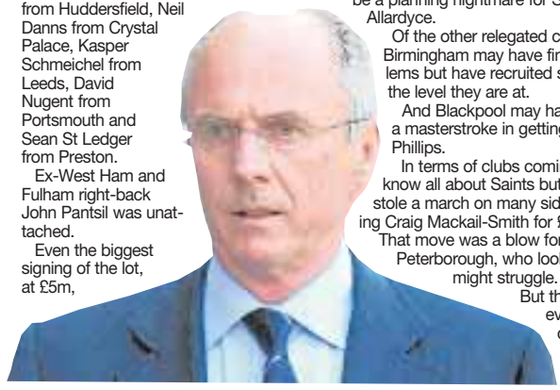
With the exception of Paul Konchesky, he has recruited from outside the top flight.

Sven, below, has not taken the approach of throwing his club's money about signing big name, so called 'marquee' players, but rather has tried to assemble a bit of a Football League All Stars side.

Lee Peltier was recruited from Huddersfield, Neil Danns from Crystal Palace, Kasper Schmeichel from Leeds, David Nugent from Portsmouth and Sean St Ledger from Preston.

Ex-West Ham and Fulham right-back John Pantsil was unattached.

Even the biggest signing of the lot, at £5m, was Matt Mills, the former Saints centre half who was playing for Reading.



The analysis of Sven's tactic is interesting. A good deal of those players are young, English and know all about the Championship. It's throwing money at the problem of winning promotion, but not in the most obvious way.

To see how it fares will be fascinating.

West Ham have taken a different approach but are not helped by the uncertainty over whether some of their star players from the top flight days will still be there come the end of August. That must be a planning nightmare for Sam Allardyce.

Of the other relegated clubs, Birmingham may have financial problems but have recruited sensibly for the level they are at.

And Blackpool may have pulled off a masterstroke in getting in Kevin Phillips.

In terms of clubs coming up we know all about Saints but Brighton stole a march on many sides by capturing Craig Mackail-Smith for £2.5m.

That move was a blow for Peterborough, who look like they might struggle.

But the Seagulls, even with the departures of Glenn Murray and Elliott Bennett, look really strong, also adding Will Hoskins, Kazenga LuaLua, Will Buckley, Romain Vincelot and Roland Bergkamp to their squad.

Looking at the ins and out for the Championship this summer, you can see how many teams are preparing to try and make the leap to become promotion contenders.

Statement of intent

Cardiff may have lost Michael Chopra to Ipswich – a statement of intent from the Tractor Boys – but bringing in Kenny Miller, Rob Earnshaw, Andrew Taylor, Don Cowie and Aron Gunnarson looks good business.

Derby have been prolific in terms of their recruitment, Millwall have strengthened but lost top scorer Steve Morison, while Steve McClaren at Nottingham Forest has brought in two experienced heads so far in Andy Reid and Jonathan Greening, who should do very well.

Portsmouth have been busy too, as well they need to be with numbers thin on the ground.

There are certainly going to be plenty of teams aiming for promotion.

But to see whether a settled squad such as Saints or Reading, a Football League All Stars side such as Leicester, or the big names at West Ham pull it off will be intriguing.

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

IT is often said it's never boring at Saints, but this season might be a bit different.

The last few years have provided plenty of drama on and off the pitch at St Mary's.

And the 2010/11 campaign was about as wild as they come.

It was tense, controversial at times, thrilling, energy-sapping and, ultimately, joyous.

As a result, there is understandable excitement about the club making a return to the Championship.

Nigel Adkins' men are certainly riding the crest of a wave, after finishing last season on a remarkable run that took them out of League One.

There is hope around St Mary's that the momentum they gained will carry them on through to a truly stunning promotion next April.

But Saints are the talented primary school kid going into the secondary ranks now.

They are good, but no longer one of the big heavyweights.

The likelihood is that it might not be too long before they become one, but there is a bit of growing to do yet.

Running with the likes of West Ham is probably a bridge too far right now.

The Hammers boast some serious quality, especially after acquiring the likes of Matt Taylor and Kevin Nolan this summer.

Saints have a decent squad too, and will go into the new campaign stronger than they finished the last.

But the Championship is a massive jump. The quality and physical fitness is higher.

And Saints are suddenly competing for players against clubs with bigger budgets or, dare I say it, bigger reputations.

Every challenge is that little bit harder.

There is no reason Saints can't meet and overcome those hurdles, but Adkins' men have to earn the right to be considered one of the big fishes in this division again.

While Saints look solid and stable, a serious promotion run is a huge ask.

Consolidating and building would be a good season. Anything above that would be a bonus.

Some will no doubt consider that view 'negative' – which, in my experience, is a word that is interchangeable for 'realistic' in the world of football.

Saints should have a good season, well away from the battle at the foot of the table.

But there is no point hysterically believing that they are going to romp home to the title and considering anything other than promotion a failure.

Chairman Nicola Cortese spoke of a five-year plan to get Saints back to the Premier League when Markus Liebherr saved the club two years ago.

That still leaves another three – plenty of time – to build a promotion-winning Championship side.

Saints have a very good basis for one with the players they have assembled, but that's what it is right now – a base.

They have bought pretty smartly, even if they haven't made an enormous splash in the market for a while.

But expecting them to repeat the feat of Norwich last season is unrealistic, simply because back-to-back promotions at this level so very rarely happen.

Saints obviously shouldn't rule it out, and it is great if there is a belief in the squad that they can do it, but they also shouldn't set themselves up for a fall.

This season, there is nothing wrong with mid-table, or an outside sniff of the play-offs.

Realistically, that is probably where Saints are right about now.

If they get really lucky and avoid any serious injuries and get off to a flying start, maybe they could snatch a top six spot.

But a lot will have to go right for them.

Finishing around midway might not be a particularly exciting season, but there's nothing wrong with a boring one for now.

If Adkins' men can consolidate this year, the likelihood is they will get even stronger in 2012/13, assuming there is still some reasonable level of investment available.

That would put them in good shape to fulfil the target of the five-year plan.

If that is a serious proposal then Saints shouldn't lose sight of it.

A bit of patience this year will go a long way.

Everyone from top to bottom at the club will probably need to remind themselves of that at times this campaign.

Things will not go as smoothly as they did in League One last season, and there will be patches of indifferent – and perhaps even just downright bad – form.

It happens. It's nothing to get too worried about.

There are always teething problems in any new division and Saints may take a little bit of time to adapt to life in the second tier again.

If people are willing to accept that, then hopefully it won't be long until they are coming to terms with yet another higher league.

MID-TABLE ANONYMITY: That would be a good 2011/12 season for Nigel Adkins and his Saints squad.

Gordon Simpson
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SPORTS REPORTER

CONSOLIDATION

... it's not a dirty word for Saints

Seagulls surprise?

WEST Ham, for me, are the class of the division, especially after the signings of Kevin Nolan and Matt Taylor.

I'm not certain Sven Goran Eriksson's spending spree at Leicester will work as well as he hopes.

But the Foxes have signed some very good players and show no sign of slowing down on that front, so I've given them the benefit of the doubt and put them second.

Blackpool have bought well this summer and shouldn't be forgotten, while

Middlesbrough will challenge at last and will make the play-offs along with Cardiff and an improved Leeds.

Brighton have added well this summer and will be a dark horse under Gus Poyet, pictured, but Birmingham will struggle to return to the Premier after losing so many players.

Saints will consolidate nicely ahead of a serious challenge in 2012/13.

But Watford, without last season's scoring sensation Danny Graham, will struggle badly.

And I'm tipping them to go down alongside Coventry, who looked very poor at times last season, and Peterborough, just because of their defensive frailties.

GORDON SIMPSON'S CHAMPIONSHIP PREDICTIONS 2011/12

1 West Ham
2 Leicester

3 Cardiff
4 Blackpool
5 Middlesbrough
6 Leeds

7 Brighton
8 Birmingham
9 Millwall
10 Ipswich
11 Reading
12 Derby
13 Saints
14 Nottm Forest
15 Portsmouth
16 Burnley
17 Hull
18 Bristol City
19 Barnsley
20 Crystal Palace
21 Doncaster

22 Watford
23 Coventry
24 Peterborough

GOT A VIEW ON SAINTS? EMAIL echosport@dailyecho.co.uk

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

- WEST Ham and Leicester are the bookies' favourites to win the Championship title in 2011/12.
- But Saints are generally rated a similar bet to the likes of Cardiff City, who have finished in the top six for the last two seasons, and Middlesbrough.
- Most of the bookies featured here believe Saints are a more likely bet for top spot than Blackpool, who were two divisions above them last season, and Leeds.
- The rank outsiders are expected to be Doncaster, Barnsley and promoted Peterborough, though Coventry are a 100-1 shot with SkyBet.
- Saints are a better bet with all the firms to win the title compared to Hampshire rivals Pompey.

	SkyBet	Ladbrokes	Bet Fred	P Power	Hills
Barnsley	100/1	80/1	100/1	80/1	100/1
Birmingham	12/1	12/1	11/1	11/1	11/1
Blackpool	18/1	20/1	20/1	18/1	20/1
Brighton	18/1	16/1	20/1	20/1	16/1
Bristol City	40/1	40/1	33/1	40/1	33/1
Burnley	20/1	20/1	16/1	20/1	20/1
Cardiff	16/1	16/1	20/1	20/1	20/1
Coventry	100/1	66/1	66/1	66/1	66/1
Crystal Palace	80/1	80/1	66/1	80/1	66/1
Derby	40/1	40/1	40/1	40/1	40/1
Doncaster	125/1	100/1	100/1	100/1	100/1
Hull	25/1	20/1	20/1	25/1	16/1
Ipswich	20/1	16/1	16/1	20/1	16/1
Leeds	18/1	16/1	18/1	18/1	20/1
Leicester	4/1	9/2	9/2	9/2	4/1
Middlesbrough	14/1	12/1	12/1	12/1	14/1
Millwall	50/1	33/1	33/1	33/1	40/1
Nottingham Forest	12/1	12/1	12/1	12/1	12/1
Peterborough	100/1	80/1	66/1	66/1	66/1
Portsmouth	33/1	33/1	33/1	40/1	33/1
Reading	14/1	12/1	12/1	14/1	12/1
SAINTS	14/1	16/1	16/1	18/1	16/1
Watford	66/1	80/1	66/1	50/1	66/1
West Ham	4/1	9/2	9/2	9/2	9/2

Countdown to big

Saints twice pegged back in their final pre-season contest

Adam Leitch
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CHIEF SPORTS REPORTER

SAINTS ended their pre-season preparations with a 2-2 draw at Yeovil.

Nigel Adkins' men twice took the lead at Huish Park but were pegged back on both occasions and now have one week to go to get themselves fully ready for the big Championship kick-off against Leeds.

David Connolly gave Saints the lead just before half-time before former Saint Paul Wotton equalised from the penalty spot on 62 minutes after a foul on Paul Huntington by Jose Fonte.

Jonathan Forte burst through the middle and produced an excellent finish to give Saints the lead again on 67 minutes but it lasted just four minutes before Andy Williams' deft header made it honours even.

Alex Chamberlain was not in the squad due to the injury he sustained against West Brom.

Dan Harding took a whack after only two minutes as he went for a header that was always his but was poleaxed by Luke Ayling who charged forward and steamed right through him.

Treatment

Harding needed a couple of minutes of treatment but was able to carry on.

The first shot of what was a quiet start to the match came on 14 minutes as Guly do Prado dragged an effort from distance well wide.

Yeovil had their first sighting of Kelvin Davis' goal four minutes later as a free kick whipped in from the left by Gavin Williams evaded everybody, including Paul Huntington at the far post who couldn't quite make contact to turn it goalwards.

Rickie Lambert had a chance on 20 minutes as Harding's free kick picked out the Saints striker some eight yards out but he didn't make clean contact with his header and it bounced up harmlessly for Jed Steer to collect.

Harding sprayed a great ball out to Adam Lallana moments later after his corner had been headed away at the near post, the midfielder fed it back it to Jose Fonte at the far post but his header picked out Steer.

Strong

Lambert forced Steer into his first meaningful save on 26 minutes as he was picked out by a deep right-wing cross, fired it goalwards from six yards out but the Yeovil keeper kept it out at his near post with a strong left hand.

David Connolly flicked a header just wide after 35 minutes but the flag was already up for offside.

Morgan Schneiderlin tried his luck from 20 yards but fired over the bar.

Harding was fouled again four

BEATEN: Yeovil keeper Jed Steer watches on as David Connolly's first-half shot creeps inside the post. Connolly is pictured celebrating, below.

YEOVIL TOWN 2 SAINTS 2

MORE SAINTS NEWS IN MONDAY'S DAILY ECHO

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

kick off REALLY begins

ABOVE: Jonathan Forte wheels away to celebrate with Jed Steer beaten.

RIGHT: Steve De Ridder goes down with an injury at full time.

LEFT: Saints fans on the final whistle.

Daily Echo pictures by Chris Moorhouse

minutes later giving Saints a free kick 30 yards out.

Lambert was allowed to take it quickly and whipped in a shot but Steer was alert to the danger and dived away to his left to keep it out.

Saints took the lead right on the stroke of half-time through a well worked free kick routine.

Lambert took a long run up to a set-piece some 30 yards out but instead of shooting he passed it into Lallana.

The midfielder flicked the ball round the corner to Connolly who finished low across Steer and into the far corner for 1-0 at the break.

That proved to be Connolly's final contribution in the game as Saints made a single change at the break with Jonathan Forte coming on to replace the goalscorer.

Forte went out to an attacking wide midfield role with Do Prado moving up front to play alongside Lambert.

Lambert had a chance of the second period as the ball was worked into him on the edge of the area but he fired well wide.

For the most part the Saints backline looked very comfortable up against Yeovil.

Buried

The odd exception came when a cross from the right almost fell into the path of Kieran Agard but Saints were able to see out the danger.

Yeovil made four changes on 62 minutes and it paid off as they were almost immediately awarded a penalty.

Huntington went down in the area under the challenge of Jose Fonte and the referee had no hesitation in pointing to the spot.

It was left to former Saints' man Wotton to do the duties and he clinically buried his spot kick into Davis' top left hand corner for 1-1.

Saints made three changes with Radhi Jaidi, Richard Chaplow and Steve De Ridder replacing Dan Seaborne, Jack Cork and Lallana.

Yeovil were buoyed by the goal and moments later a block from Harding denied Ed Upson after he drilled in a fierce effort.

Upson was in business again a minute later but this time it was Davis doing the blocking.

Saints retook the lead on 67 minutes though as Forte produced a dramatic break through the middle and a finish to match as he smashed his shot across Steer and into the back of the net.

But that lasted just four minutes as Upson whipped in a cross from the right which found Andrew Williams who flicked a header into the far corner to level it up at 2-2.

Saints made a further two changes on 79 minutes with Frazer Richardson and Aaron Martin coming on for Danny Butterfield and Fonte.

Saints did have one late chance as Lambert's far post header was caught by Steer and the game ended in a draw.

TEAMCHECK

Yeovil: Steer, Ayling (Gibson 87), Huntington, N'Gala, Ehmer, Jones (Edgar 61), Wotton, Upson, G Williams (A Williams 61), McLean (Fallon 61), Agard (Curtis 61).

Saints: Davis, Butterfield (Richardson 79), Fonte (Martin 79), Seaborne (Jaidi 63), Harding, Do Prado, Schneiderlin, Cork (Chaplow 63), Lallana (De Ridder 63), Connolly (Forte 45), Lambert.

Att: 2,018.

TURN TO BACK PAGE FOR MORE YEOVIL v SAINTS PICTURES

Did You Know?

BRIGHTON & Hove Albion this summer became the 27th Premiership or Football League club to move to a new stadium since the Hillsborough Disaster in 1989.

Their first Championship match at the new Amex Stadium will be against Doncaster next weekend.

Here, the Sports Pink looks at the other clubs that have moved since 1989.

Premiership

Arsenal: Highbury to Emirates .2006
Bolton: Burnden Park to The Reebok Stadium 1997
Manchester City: Maine Road to Eithad Stadium 2003
Stoke City: Victoria Ground to Britannia Stadium 1997
Sunderland: Roker Park to Stadium of Light 1997
Swansea City: Vetch Field to Liberty Stadium 2005
Wigan Athletic: Springfield Park to DW Stadium 1999

Championship

Brighton: Withdean Stadium to AMEX Stadium 2011
Cardiff City: Ninian Park to Cardiff City Stadium 2009
Coventry City: Highfield Road to Ricoh Arena 2005

AMEX STADIUM

Derby County: Baseball Ground to Pride Park 1997
Doncaster Rovers: Belle Vue to Keepmoat Stadium 2007
Hull City: Boothferry Park to KC Stadium 2002
Leicester City: Filbert Street to King Power Stadium 2003
Millwall: The Den to The New Den 1993
Middlesbrough: Ayresome Park to Riverside 1995
Reading: Elm Park to Madejski Stadium 1998
Saints: The Dell to St Mary's ...2001

League 1

Chesterfield: Recreation Ground to B2net Stadium 2010
MK Dons: National Hockey Stadium to Stadiummk 2007
Walsall: Fellows Park to Bescot Stadium 1990
Wycombe: Loakes Park to Adams Park 1990
Yeovil: Huish to Huish Park 1990

League 2

Northampton: County Ground to Sixfields 1994
Oxford United: Manor Ground to Kassam Stadium 2001
Shrewsbury: Gay Meadow to Greenhous Meadow 2007

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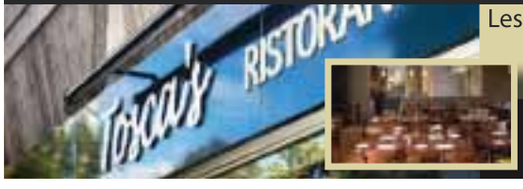

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Football Stats

Championship top scorers

New Blackpool signing Kevin Phillips was top scorer in the second tier 12 years ago during his time at Sunderland.

2010/11 Danny Graham (Watford) 24
2009/10 Peter Whittingham (Cardiff City) 22
2008/09 Sylvan Ebanks-Blake (Wolves) 25
2007/08 Sylvan Ebanks-Blake (Wolves/Plymouth) 23
2006/07 Jamie Cureton (Colchester) 23
2005/06 Marlon King (Watford) . . .21
2004/05 Nathan Ellington (Wigan) 24
2003/04 Andrew Johnson (Crystal Palace) 27
2002/03 Svetoslav Todorov (Portsmouth) 26
2001/02 Shaun Goater (Man City) .28
2000/01 Louis Saha (Fulham) 27
1999/00 Lee Hughes (WBA) 31
1998/99 Kevin Phillips (Sunderland) 29
1997/98 Pierre Van Hooijdonk (Nottm Forest) 29
1996/97 John McGinlay (Bolton) .24
1995/96 John Aldridge (Tranmere) 27
1994/95 John Aldridge (Tranmere) 24
1993/94 John McGinlay (Bolton) .25
1992/93 Guy Whittingham (Portsmouth) 42

JACK STEPHENS

Daily Echo READER OFFER

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COUNTDOW

The next g

SAINTS' first-team has understandably taken the spotlight this pre-season – but the club's youth stars have also been catching the eye.

Around St Mary's, there is genuine excitement about the current crop of academy and development players that have been assembled.

One ex-pro who was watching the under-21s friendly at Totton earlier this month described them as a "special group".

And the club's academy staff could barely hide their enthusiasm about the potential of the youth squads as they arrived at the same game.

While football is very much about the here and now, planning for the future is essential for any club to be successful in the long-term.

Saints, for their part, have been doing their best for many years to stockpile talent in their junior ranks.

It is certainly not a new phenomenon.

Gordon Simpson
gordon.simpson@dailyecho.co.uk
SPORTS REPORTER

From the likes of Matt Le Tissier and Alan Shearer all the way through to Theo Walcott and Gareth Bale, there has been a fairly continual stream of top young talent to progress through the Saints system.

The latest bunch may also contain a few gems.

Certainly on first glance, 17-year-old defender Jack Stephens looks a real star in the making.

That is perhaps no surprise given that Saints shelled out £150,000 to sign him from Plymouth earlier this year.

Accomplished at right-back, Stephens is also capable of playing in the heart of defence.

His promise is such that he has been handed a first-team squad number for the new campaign.

And he is not the only one either.

Midfielder James Ward-Prowse is only 16, but will wear the number 30 shirt for Nigel Adkins' squad this term.

Whether he gets a game at any stage remains to be seen, but it is a real indication of how Saints view him.

Ward-Prowse has, in fact, already represented his country, after being called-up to the England Under-17 squad wh he was just 15.

Another academy player who h been chosen by England – at unde 16 level – is attacking full-back Lu Shaw, who turned 16 this month.

Like Ward-Prowse, Shaw has be with Saints since he was eight.

There have been rumours th Arsenal have been sniffing abo him, but it is unlikely Saints wou even entertain letting him go at th stage.

There are also high hopes for year-old centre back Aarr Racine, who was on the verge of first-team call-up under form

PROMISING: Sam Hoskins, main pic, and Harle

IN-DEPTH GUIDE TO SAINTS' CHAMPION

N TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

generation

e Dean, inset bottom left.

CORBY MOORE

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head coach Jan Poortvliet in the 2008/09 season.

At Totton, in the under-21s opening pre-season friendly, the imposing defender formed an impressive partnership with another powerful presence, Harlee Dean.

He was signed from Dagenham & Redbridge in 2010 on a two-year development contract.

Central midfielders Andy Robinson, 18, and Corby Moore, 17, as well as winger Lloyd Isgrove and striker Sam Hoskins, both 17, are also well thought of.

Talented and confident 16-year-old midfielder Harrison Reed is another one to keep an eye on too, possessing great ability and vision on the ball.

And Saints will be very happy if 16-year-old striker Jake Sinclair can turn out to be as good as his brother, Scott, the former Chelsea forward now with Swansea.

The chances of all those players becoming real stars is obviously slim, but Saints will hope there are a few diamonds in their development system.

The club will certainly be looking for a good run in the FA Youth Cup this season.

But, perhaps most importantly, there is a sense at Saints that, in terms of talent coming through, the future is bright.

Of course, having a great academy isn't necessarily a precursor to future first-team success.

In fact, Saints are the perfect example of that. Back in 2005, the under-18 team reached the FA Youth Cup final.

Although they lost to underdogs Ipswich, they were still considered by many to have been the class of the country.

But, ultimately, Saints reaped little in the way of benefits from that group.

Thoroughbreds

Some reached the first team, but much of the best talent, such as Walcott, was quickly picked off by other clubs.

Of course, Saints received handsome transfer fees in many cases.

But none of that could stop the club sliding towards League One and administration – hardly what had been hoped for.

Other players, of course, failed to reach the level that had been hoped, or expected, of them and simply drifted off.

Adam Lallana does, however, remain and that in itself is plenty to be thankful for.

But the deluge of talent that was expected to flood Saints' first-team for years to come never really arrived.

In that sense, a football club's academy can be viewed a bit like the Grand National.

You train and coach as best you can, set all of your runners off and hope that most of them will make it to the end.

And, of those that do, you pray one or two will become champion thoroughbreds.

Only time will tell if Saints really have any of those in their youth ranks right now.

ANDY ROBINSON

Did You Know

NIGEL Adkins has only been a Football League manager for less than five years, but he already has three promotions to his name.

Only one of his Championship counterparts can equal that record.

Adkins has three times gone up from League One – in 2006/07 and 2008/09 with Scunthorpe and last season with Saints.

Ipswich Town boss Paul Jewell has also won three promotions.

He guided Bradford City into the top flight back in 1998/99 and then masterminded equally unfashionable Wigan Athletic's rise from the third tier to the Premiership with promotions in 2002/03 and again two seasons later.

Pompey boss Steve Cotterill has won four promotions during his managerial career, but two of them were in the non league with Cheltenham.

Cotterill also took the Robins up from League One in 2001/02 and was in charge when Notts County won the same league in 2009/10, though he was only in charge for the last few months in the latter campaign.

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SHIP RIVALS - SEE PAGES 28-39 INCLUSIVE

SOUTHERN Daily Echo

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FIND THE BALL is a test of skill and football knowledge and is open to readers of the Southampton, Bournemouth, Dorset Echos, Brighton Argus and Sunday Independent, Plymouth.

You have to use your skill and judgement to determine the exact centre of the ball.

Mark an X with a ballpoint pen on the picture where you consider that position to be – clear rubber stamps and self adhesive labels will also be accepted.

Every coupon will be carefully examined and the jackpot prize will be paid to the entrant whose cross marks the exact centre of the ball when the photograph was taken.

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The nearest-miss prize will be paid out to the competitor whose cross is nearest to the centre of the ball when there is no jackpot winner.

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The jackpot for the following week will be £26,000 with £1,000 being added each week. The nearest miss prize will be £2,000 with £50 added each week until the jackpot prize reaches £50,000.

If there is still no entry showing the exact centre of the ball, the process is repeated until there is an exact centre of the ball winner.

If there is more than one winner the jackpot will be shared and, similarly, if there is more than one runner-up the nearest miss prize will also be shared.

RESULTS

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Winners

Competition number **S29**

JACKPOT WINNER **NO WINNER**

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An incident in a Plymouth v Southampton match

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COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

SMURF FEVER!

What life was like when Saints were last newly promoted

THE Smurfs were riding high in the music charts when Saints last started a league season with the prefix 'newly-promoted' attached to them.

It was August 1978 and Father Abrahams' small blue people were making the nation sing and dance.

Well, some of them.

Elsewhere, the Commodores' Three Times A Lady was No 1 after Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta's epic You're The One That I Want' had been knocked off top spot.

The average price of a house was around the £13,000 mark – it's now around £166,000 – while the average yearly wage was under £3,500.

Telly favourites such as The Good Life, The Sweeny and Opportunity Knocks all ended in 1978, while Grange Hill, Dallas and Battlestar Galactica were first screened.

The average price of a pint of beer in a pub was under 20p, and Argentina had recently won the World Cup, with the long-haired Mario Kempes kickstarting glorious ticker-tape celebrations.

Kempes had scored twice in the final, a 3-1 win over Holland who included a defender by the name of Jan Poortvliet. Whatever happened to him ….

Bjorn Borg had recently won Wimbledon for a third year in a row, and the Swede would go on to win the next two men's singles titles too.

Elsewhere in the world, Pope Paul VI died in Castelgandolfo just a few days before Saints made their top flight return.

And history was made when Double Eagle II became the first balloon to successfully cross the Atlantic Ocean, flying from Maine on the American coast to Miserey in France.

Though England had not qualified for the World Cup finals, the 1978/79 First Division season opened with its own bit of South American glamour.

Tottenham, promoted back to the top flight along with

Simon Carter
simon.carter@dailyecho.co.uk
SPORTS EDITOR

Lawrie McMenemy's Saints and champions Bolton, had pulled off the main transfer market coup by signing World Cup winners Ossie Ardiles and Ricky Villa.

Saints had just the one new signing in their team as they walked out on the opening day at Norwich's Carrow Road.

Winger Terry Curran was handed his league debut as McMenemy's side, playing a First Division game for the first time since May 1974, suffered a 3-1 defeat.

Yugoslavian defender Ivan Golac had been signed by

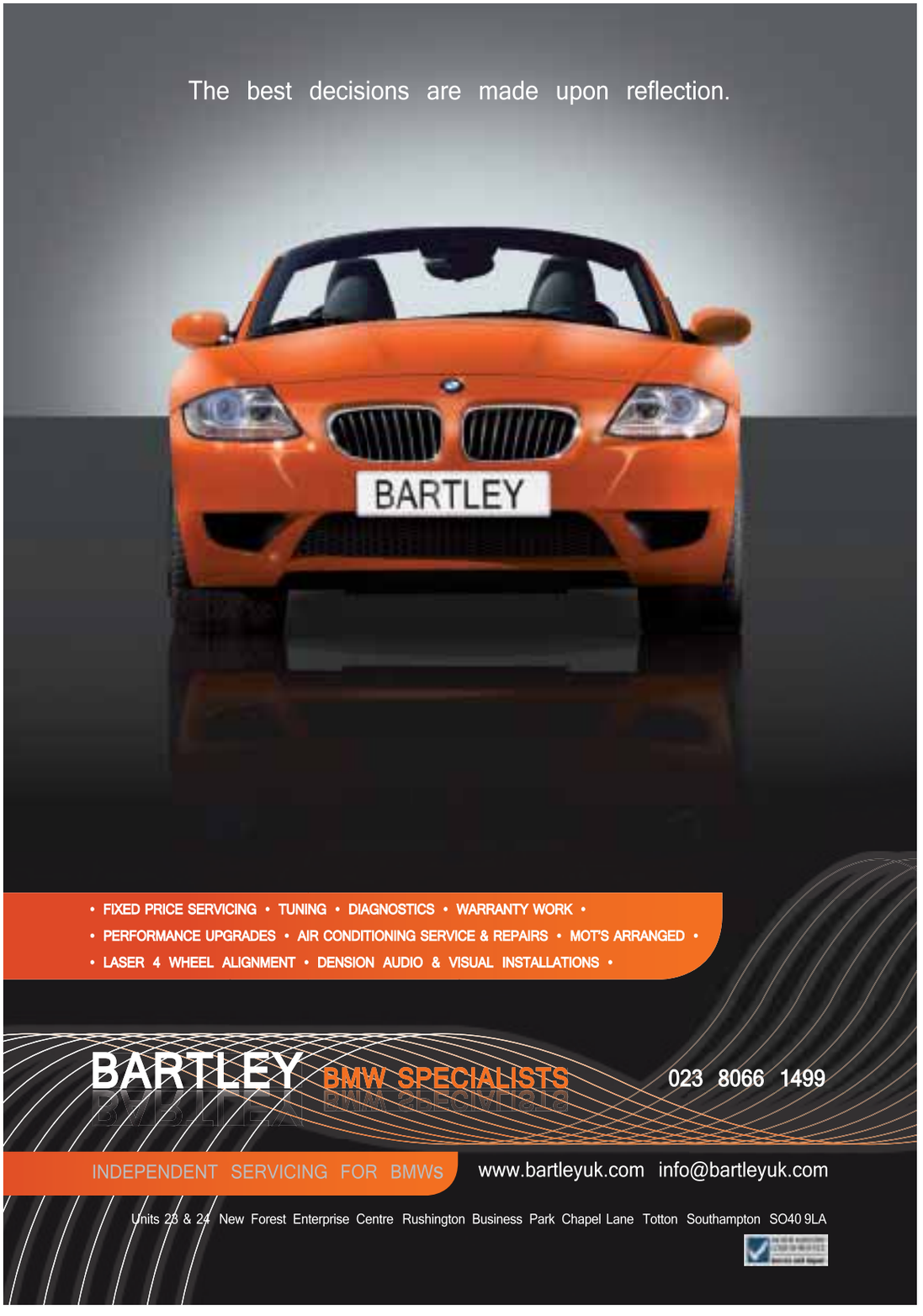
FAMILIAR FACE: Martin Chivers lines up against Saints, August 1978.

Saints, but sat out the curtain-raiser as his work permit had not been granted.

There was a very familiar face in the Canaries side, former Saints striker Martin Chivers.

And it was Chivers who celebrated his return to English football – he had been playing for Swiss club Servette for two years – by scoring Norwich's third goal.

Kevin Reeves and John Ryan had put the hosts in command with Ted MacDougall bagging a late consolation for Saints.



COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

BARNSLEY

Ground: Oakwell

Capacity: 23,099

Record attendance: 40,255 v Stoke City, FA Cup fifth round, Feb 1936

Nickname: Tykes

Last 10 seasons

01/02 23rd (Champ) R
02/03 19th (L1)
03/04 12th
04/05 13th
05/06 5th P*
06/07 20th (Champ)
07/08 18th
08/09 20th
09/10 20th
10/11 17th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Adam Hammil 8, Andy Gray 7, Danny Haynes 6, Gary O'Connor 4, Marlon Harewood 4, Jason Shackell 3.

In: Craig Davies (Chesterfield, free), David Perkins (Colchester, free), Rob Edwards (Blackpool, free) Miles Addison (Derby County, loan) Jim Mcnulty (Brighton, undisclosed).

Out: Jason Shackell (Derby, undisclosed) Matt Hill (free), Kern Miller (Accrington, loan).

Last 10 managers
Dave Basset (May 99-Dec 00)
Nigel Spackman (Jan 01-Oct 01)
Steve Parkin (Nov 01-Oct 02)
Glyn Hodges (Oct 02-Jun 03)
Gudjon Thorarson (Jun 03-Mar 04)
Paul Hart (Mar 04-Mar 05)
Andy Ritchie (Mar 05-Nov 06)
Simon Davey (Nov 06-Aug 09)
Mark Robins (Sep 09-May 11)
Keith Hill (Jun 11 -)

Celebrity fans
Dickie Bird (former cricket umpire), Darren Gough (former England cricketer), Michael Parkinson (TV personality)

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 0 Barnsley 0
Barnsley 0 Saints 1 (McGoldrick)

Played for Saints and Barnsley
John Beresford, Norman Dean, Stuart Gray, David Hirst, Neil Maddison, Mike Pickering, Neil Shipperley, Adam Hammill, Bartosz Bialkowski.

Barca at Barnsley!

THE man who masterminded a double over Saints last season has set his sights on a new target – starting to turn Barnsley into the new Barcelona.

It might sound a little optimistic, but Keith Hill is a man on a mission.

The 42-year-old moved from Rochdale, who defeated Saints twice last season, to Oakwell in the close season and insists he is learning from the best managers in the game, including Barca boss Pep Guardiola.

He said: "Pep, along with Alex Ferguson and Sam Allardyce, is one of my mentors.

"He is just an incredible coach to learn from – especially when you look at what he does at Barcelona and the way he gets them to play.

"It is beautiful football and something all young managers should aspire to.

"I am not saying we are going to turn into Barcelona overnight, but to get my teams to play in that kind of manner is something I would like to see.

"That is the style of football I shall be trying to bring here, and I hope it is what the fans will appreciate.

"But, having said that, I know the most important thing is being successful.

"That means winning football matches and, at the end of the day, it's those three points which mean more than anything, so we shall be competing hard out on the pitch."

Having guided Rochdale to promotion from League One in 2009/10, Hill is aiming to repeat the trick with the Tykes – only this time making it to the top flight.

"Barnsley have made it to the Premier League before, and Blackpool did it against all the odds, so it can be done," he reckoned.

"There is no reason why we can't repeat what Danny Wilson's side here did 14 years ago – and getting to the top flight is our aim and ambition.

"We are 100/1 to win the Championship this season, but we have got a fighting chance and we shall take that fight on."

Barnsley have finished in the lower half of the second tier in all five seasons since winning promotion from League One in 2006.

But Hill is pleased with the progress that has been made this summer.

"The players are responding well to the way that I manage and coach," he reflected. "I'm pleased with the endeavour that they've shown and the participation in my vision.

"But there's got to be that responsibility – that acceptance from the players to defend."

MENTOR: Barnsley boss Keith Hill, left, is taking inspiration from Barcelona's Pep Guardiola.

An uncertain future

BIRMINGHAM go into the new Championship season as one the division's big guns, but with plenty of uncertainty hanging over them.

Relegation from the top flight has thrown their finances into a tailspin, with a number of big players such as Sebastian Larsson, Roger Johnson, Craig Gardner, Lee Bowyer and Kevin Phillips having been released or sold.

In addition, Birmingham president Carsson Yeung has been charged with money laundering offences.

Hughton, who took over from Alex McLeish after his controversial move to Aston Villa, is trying to focus on what he can control.

"I know where we are financially and I know the ramifications of relegation," he said. "I'm realistic as to where the club is at this particular moment. There isn't anything I've come into that I wasn't aware of.

"There will be lots of speculation about players and possibly some of that speculation will be truth.

"Craig Gardner has gone, we've brought in players in the summer. Anything over and above that, we will have to deal with when it comes.

"We have to work the system best we can but I will certainly get support from the club on players I want to bring in.

"We also have to think about any younger lads in that reserve team group who have shown promise. There are opportunities for younger players.

"But I am conscious that I do have to have a squad big enough. And do I anticipate players coming in? Yes, I do."

The players that have so far arrived include Marlon King – the Championship's top scorer in 2005/06 during his time at Watford – Chris Burke, Morgaro Gomis, Adam Rooney and Steve Caldwell.

"We know it will be a tough task," said Hughton on his aim of promotion. "I hope I can do it.

"It's a tough season, a very tough division. I feel you want to work at a club where you have a good chance of getting back where this club wants to be and belongs. I feel I have that here.

"The ultimate aim is to get back into the Premier League, and the job starts now."

Birmingham have won promotion in each of their last three seasons in the Championship – in 2001, 2007 and 2009 – and Hughton added: "I am very aware of the history at the club.

"I consider Birmingham a proper football club - the tradition and support base that fits the club. I am delighted to be here.

"I am very conscious that what I regard as the big jobs only come around every so often.

"There are a lot of very good managers that I know would have been happy to be sitting where I am now."

Hughton won the Championship title with Newcastle two seasons ago.

CHRIS HUGHTON

BIRMINGHAM

Ground: St Andrews

Capacity: 30,016

Record attendance: 66,844 v Everton, FA Cup fifth round, Mar 1939.

Nickname: Blues

Last 10 seasons
01/02 5th (Champ) P
02/03 13th (Prem)
03/04 10th
04/05 12th
05/06 18th R
06/07 2nd (Champ) P
07/08 19th (Prem) R
08/09 2th (Champ) P
09/10 9th (Prem)
10/11 18th R

Top league scorers 2010/11
Craig Gardener 8, Nikola Zigic 5, Liam Ridgewell 4, Sebastian Larsson 4, Lee Bowyer 4, Cameron Jerome 3, Jean Beausejour 2, Scott Dann 2, Roger Johnson 2.

In: Marlon King (Coventry, free), Chris Burke (Cardiff, free), Morgaro Gomis (Dundee United, free), Adam Rooney (Inverness, free), Steven Caldwell (Wigan, free) Morgaro Gomis (Dundee United, free).

Out: Sebastian Larsson (Sunderland, free), Craig Gardner (Sunderland, £6m), Lee Bowyer (Ipswich Town, free), Roger Johnson (Wolves, undisclosed).

Last 10 managers
Ron Saunders (Feb 82-Jan 86)
John Bond (Jan 86-May 87)
Garry Pendrey (May 8-Apr 89)
Dave Mackay (Apr 89-Jan 91)
Terry Cooper (Aug 91-Nov 93)
Barry Fry (Dec 93 - Oct 01)
Trevor Francis (May 96-Oct 01)
Steve Bruce (Dec 01-Nov 07)
Alex McLeish (Nov 07-June 11)
Chris Hughton (June 11 –)

Celebrity fans:
Colin Buchanan (actor, (Dalziel & Pascoe), Jasper Carrot (comedian), Jeff Lynne (musician ELO).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 1 Birmingham 2 (Perry)
Birmingham 1 Saints 0

Played for both Saints and Blues
Ken Armstrong, John Beresford, Jason Bowen, Edwin Brown, Simon Charlton, Lew Chatterley, Mark Dennis, Richard Dryden, Scott Hiley, Barry Horne, Jeff Kenna, Chris Marsden, Jim Montgomery, David Speedie, David Wallace, Frank Worthington, Radhi Jaidi.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

BLACKPOOL

Ground: Bloomfield Road

Capacity: 16,750

Record attendance: 38,098 v Wolves, First Division, Sept 1955

Nickname: Tangerines

Last 10 seasons
01/02 16th (League 1)
02/03 13th
03/04 14th
04/05 16th
05/06 19th
06/07 3rd P
07/08 19th (Champ)
08/09 16th
09/10 6th P
10/11 19th (Prem) R

Top league scorers 2010/11
DJ Campbell 13, Charlie Adam 12, Gary Taylor-Fletcher 6, Luke Varney 5, Marlon Harewood 5, Jason Puncheon 3

In: Bojan Djordic (Videoton, free), Kevin Phillips (Birmingham City, free), Gerado Bruna (Liverpool, undisclosed), Bob Harris (Queen of the South, free), Craig Sutherland (unattached), Paul Bignot (Newport, undisclosed), Angel Martinez (Espanyol, free).

Out: Paul Rachubka (Leeds, free), Rob Edwards (Barnsley, free), Andy Reid (Nottingham Forest, free), Charlie Adam (Liverpool, undisclosed), David Vaughan (Sunderland, free), Danny Coid (Accrington Stanley, free), Ishmael Demontagnac (Notts County, free).

Last 10 managers
Graham Carr (Jun 09-Nov 90)
Billy Ayre (Nov 90-Jun 94)
Sam Allardyce (Jul 94-May 96)
Gary Megson (Jul 96-Jul 97)
Nigel Worthington (Jul 97-Dec 99)
Steve McMahon (Jan 00-Jun 04)
Colin Hendry (Jun 04-Nov 05)
Simon Grayson (Nov 05-Dec 08)
Tony Parkes (Dec 08-May 09)
Ian Holloway (May 09 -)

Celebrity fans:
Bill Beaumont (former England rugby captain), Graham Kelly (former FA Chief Executive), Paddy McGuinness (comedian).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 0 Blackpool 1
Blackpool 1 Saints 1 (McGoldrick)

Played for both Saints and Blackpool
Alan Ball, John Burridge, Stephen Davis, Hugh Fisher, Dennis Hollywood, Fred Kemp, David Lee, Ted MacDougall, Eric Nixon, Brett Ormerod, George Shipley, Jason Euell, Stephen Crainey, Simon Gillett.

I'll repay the faith

FORMER Saints striker Kevin Phillips is hoping to prove the critics wrong once again.

The 38-year-old was released by Birmingham following their relegation from the Premier League.

He resisted the temptation to hang up his boots to sign a one-year contract at Blackpool, who are also preparing for life back in the second tier.

Phillips, who cost Saints £3.25m when he joined back in 2003, is now in the twilight of his career but believes he can repay the faith shown in him by Pools boss Ian Holloway.

"It's been fun and exciting which is just what I needed at this stage in my career," said Phillips, who has scored 225 league goals in a 500-game career, of his early days at Bloomfield Road.

"You hear a lot of people talking about the manager and he hasn't let me down so far, he's so knowledgeable about the game and enthusiastic and that rubs off on players - hopefully that will rub off on me and I'm looking forward to the season now.

"I've got to repay the club, not too many clubs would've taken me and put their trust in me at my age and given me a contract.

STILL GOT A LOT TO OFFER: Kevin Phillips.

"But I still believe, and the gaffer still believes, that I can do a job at this level.

"I showed last season in the Premier League that I've still got the fitness and I'm hopeful I'll chip in with a fair few goals this season and play a lot of games."

Phillips is aiming to win promotion from the second tier for the fourth time, and with his fourth different club.

He went up with Sunderland in 1999, West Brom in 2008 and Birmingham 12 months later.

He has also been relegated from the Premiership with four clubs – Sunderland, Saints, West Brom and Birmingham!

Blackpool, buoyed by their parachute payments and having kept finances tight during their brief top flight stay, are certainly not lacking ambition.

They have sold key midfielder Charlie Adam but have brought in a few new faces.

The aim is simple – to try and bounce back to the Premier League at the first opportunity.

At the very least they hope to be right back up there challenging and laying the basis for promotion, something which could hardly have been imagined just a few short years ago before Holloway was recruited.

"It was nice to play at Bloomfield Road, I've played here a few times and scored a few goals against Blackpool," added Phillips.

"It would be nice to get off to a flyer and score a few goals for the club.

"Promotion is what we'll set out to get, I'm sure the manager hasn't stopped signing players and if two or three more quality players arrive before the start of the season, we'll be looking strong."

The new nemesis ...

REWIND a year and it would be hard to imagine a more pointed grudge match than Saints v Pompey back in the Championship.

However, for the staff and players at St Mary's, if not quite for the fans, such a thing will exist this season.

Brighton have become the new nemesis.

The loathing between the clubs could barely be more mutual.

It all started after the dour goalless draw at St Mary's, a game where both benches riled each other over various tactics.

Nigel Adkins made what was, in fairness to him, a totally throwaway and jokey remark after the game, the now infamous 'if they can keep up with us' line when asked whether it would be Brighton and Saints battling for the title come the spring.

It all went quiet, but then as soon as the Seagulls had secured promotion they made it clear those few words from the unassuming Adkins, a man who would seemingly find it hard to give a verbal blast to his worst enemy, motivated them to win the title.

Then came the game at the Withdean, and with it a remarkable spectacle.

KEY SIGNING: Craig Mackail-Smith (centre).

Pretty much every opportunity to tease and taunt Adkins and Saints was taken, though Saints had the last laugh with a late victory that put them on their way to automatic promotion, albeit behind Brighton.

Brighton boss Gus Poyet was smarting publicly for some time and so this season's meetings are likely to be fiery to say the least.

Brighton stole a march on Saints, and many other Championship rivals, by securing Craig Mackail-Smith from Peterborough for £2.5m.

The Scottish international was the star man in League One last season with 35 goals in all competitions.

They have also signed Will Hoskins – who scored 20 goals for relegated Bristol Rovers – Will Buckley, Romain Vincelot and Roland Berkamp.

Pacy winger Kazenga LuaLua is also back on loan from Newcastle.

That is just as well as Brighton have lost some key players from their League One title winning side such as top scorer Glenn Murray and winger Elliott Bennett.

It will be Mackail-Smith, though, who carries much of the focus and his form may ultimately decide the fate of Brighton's season.

Poyet said: "He is a player that we can build our team around, which is why I was so keen to bring him here.

"One of the most pleasing aspects for me is that we signed him despite interest from some other big, big teams.

"Some thought it was a done deal that he would be heading elsewhere, but we got the player which is good, as it shows that we want to go places.

"When I first sat down with the chairman, Craig was our number one target, so I was absolutely delighted to sign him."

BRIGHTON

Ground: Amex Stadium

Capacity: 22,500

Record attendance: 36,747 (Goldstone Ground) v Fulham, Second Division, Dec 1958.

Nickname: Seagulls

Last 10 seasons
01/02 1st (League 1) P
02/03 23rd (Champ) R
03/04 4th (League 1) P
04/05 20th (Champ)
05/06 24th R
06/07 18th (League 1)
07/08 7th
08/09 16th
09/10 13th
01/11 1st P

Top league scorers 2010/11
Glenn Murray 22, Ashley Barnes 18, Chris Wood 8, Inigo Calderon 7, Elliott Bennett 6

In: Will Hoskins (Bristol Rovers, undisclosed), Will Buckley (Watford, £1m), Craig Mackail-Smith (undisclosed), Roland Bergkamp (Excelsior, undisclosed), Romain Vincelot (Dagenham & Redbridge, undisclosed), Kazenga LuaLua (Newcastle, loan)

Out: Glenn Murray (Crystal Palace, free), Elliott Bennett (Norwich, undisclosed), Jim McNulty (Barnsley, undisclosed).

Last 10 managers
Steve Gritt (Dec 96-Feb 98)
Brian Horton (Feb 98-Jan 99)
Micky Adams (Apr 99-Oct 01)
Peter Taylor (Oct 01-May 02)
Steve Coppell (Oct 02-Oct 03)
Mark McGhee (Oct 03-Sep 06)
Dean Wilkins (Sep 06-May 08)
Micky Adams (May 08-Feb 09)
Russel Slade (Mar 09-Nov 09)
Gus Poyet (Nov 09-Present)

Celebrity fans
Des Lynam (television presenter), Norman Cook (Fat Boy Slim, DJ).

Last time they met Saints 2010/2011
Saints 0 Brighton 0
Brighton 1 Saints 2 (Connolly, Fonte)

Played for both Saints and Seagulls
Derek Allan, Ian Baird, David Beasant, Jimmy Case, Martin Chivers, Justin Fashanu, Michael Hennigan, Thomas Lewis, Charles Livesey, Craig Maskell, John McGrath, Russell Osman, Dean Hammond, Dan Harding, Michael Poke.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

BRISTOL CITY

Ground: Ashton Gate

Capacity: 21,479

Record attendance: 43,335 v Preston North End, FA Cup fifth round, Feb 1935

Nickname: Robins

Last 10 seasons
01/02 7th (League 1)
02/03 3rd
03/04 3rd
04/05 7th
05/06 9th
06/07 2nd P
07/08 4th (Champ)
08/09 10th
09/10 10th
10/11 15th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Brett Pitman 13, Jon Stead 9, Marvin Elliot 8, David Clarkson 7, Nicky Maynard 6.

In: Yannick Bolasie (Plymouth, undisclosed), Ryan Taylor (Rotherham, tribunal), Neil Kilkenny (Leeds, free).

Out: John Akinde (Crawley, undisclosed) Stephen Henderson (Portsmouth, Undisclosed).

Last 10 managers
Russell Osman (Feb 93-Nov 94)
Joe Jordan (Nov 94-Mar 97)
John Ward (Mar 97-Oct 98)
Benny Lennartsson (Oct 98-Jul 99)
Tony Pulis (Jul 99-Jan 00)
Danny Wilson (Jun 00-Jun 04)
Brian Tinnion (Jun 04-Sep 05)
Gary Johnson (Sep 05-Mar 10)
Steve Coppell (Apr 10-Aug 10)
Keith Millen (Aug 10 -)

Celebrity fans
Marcus Trescothick (former England cricketer), David Graveney (former England cricket chairman of selectors).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 0 Bristol City 1
Bristol City 2 Saints 0

Played for both Saints and Robins
Paul Allen, Ian Baird, David Burnside, Colin Cramb, Richard Davis, Richard Dryden, Neil Heaney, Stig Johansen, William Jones, Joe Jordan, Phi Kite, Tony Knapp, Neil Maddison, Steve Neville, Russell Osman, Forbes Phillipson-Masters, Dani Rodrigues

James' City slickers

BRISTOL City haven't enjoyed the best year or two but, according to one familiar face at Ashton Gate, things are on the up.

Former England and Pompey goalkeeper David James was the star recruit for City last summer, signed by then manager Steve Coppell before he left the club just two games into the season.

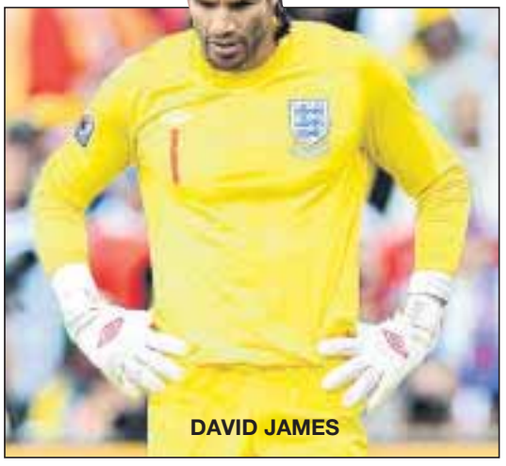
It was a faltering campaign from then on, featuring plenty of highs and lows after Keith Millen was appointed as boss.

But this summer Millen has had a clear run at pre-season and 40-year-old James, who has a new one year deal, goes into the new campaign with greater optimism.

He said: "Despite all the adversities last season, on a number of occasions we showed our capabilities.

"Yes, there were some inconsistencies that let us down and too often we allowed teams to beat us.

"When we got it right, we could win games against whoever we faced. I'm confident we can do good things this season, as I've been assuring City fans whenever I bump into them around the world.



DAVID JAMES

"The manager is getting a decent squad together with some hungry younger players coming on board, all hoping to challenge for first-team places straight away.

"The squad is coming together and we also have a decent staff in place..

"We should take a lot of heart from the positives of last season and take them into the upcoming campaign.

The goal when I first joined was promotion.

"We had a tough battle, but we should be better for that experience."

City's major summer signings have included pacy winger Yannick Bolasie from Plymouth, striker Ryan Taylor from Rotherham and midfielder Neil Kilkenny from Leeds.

Their major battle has been trying to keep hold of star striker Nicky Maynard in the face of interest from plenty of clubs.

Leicester were offering princely sums for his services before deciding to look elsewhere.

Even Saints made an enquiry, only to be told City were looking for around £4m for their main man, who scored less Championship goals for City last season than ex-Cherries star Brett Pitman.

For Millen, though, the focus has been on better preparations, which he hopes will pay dividends when the campaign gets underway.

Millen added: "We're in a far better place than at this stage last summer.

"It just seemed to be one injury after another back then and it had a knock-on affect on the rest of the players, many of whom had to play too many games in pre-season.

"I remember we lost Nicky Maynard, Danny Haynes and Louis Carey from the start and then picked up a load more injuries in the friendly games."

South coast links

BURNLEY may be more than 250 miles away from the south coast, but there are more footballing links between the two areas than some might realise.

Many them come from just down the road towards Bournemouth.

The Clarets are now managed by former Cherries boss Eddie Howe after his move up north following great success at Dean Court.

Howe's major signings, which came back in January, are Bournemouth's Marvin Bartley and striker Charlie Austin, the former Poole Town front man who has been so prolific against Saints for Swindon.

On top of that it was Saints who beat Burnley to the signature of Jack Cork, who spent last season on loan at Turf Moor.

The 22-year-old Austin, who had sit out much of the second half of last season following his move due to a dislocated shoulder, is chomping at the bit to prove what he can do after starring in League One for Swindon.

"I am looking forward to getting started again," said Austin.

POINT TO PROVE: Charlie Austin, left, has recovered from a dislocated shoulder.

"I had a thing to prove when I came. I had scored goals in League One and I wanted to be a goalscorer in the Championship but unfortunately it got cut short because of my injury.

"Last season was a bit of a killer because I didn't play much.

"But I have worked hard with the fitness staff and physios and now I'm ready to go.

"I have got a lot to prove to myself and other people. I just want to progress and Burnley is the club I want to be at."

There have been a few departures from Turf Moo this summer such as Clarke Carlisle, Graham Alexander and striker Chris Iwelumo.

New arrivals have been rather thin on the ground but Howe insisted: "There is certainly no massive rebuilding job that needs doing.

"I can assure everyone that we are working hard to get things done, but you can't rush these things."

Burnley are in the second year of their £16m parachute payments following relegation from the Premier League but, despite keeping their finances tight, they are still expecting a promotion push.

When asked if he was confident that Burnley could go up chief executive Paul Fletcher said: "Absolutely I'm confident – and the reason I'm confident is that we've done it before.

"The good thing about Burnley is that we are owned by local people.

"There are a lot of foreign investors coming in at other clubs and that is something we have to compete against."

Burnley duo Chris Eagles and Tyrone Mears played for Bolton in a friendly in midweek and are expected to leave permanently.

BURNLEY

Ground: Turf Moor

Capacity: 22,456

Record attendance: 54,775 v Huddersfield Town, FA Cup third round, Feb 1924.

Nickname: Clarets

Last 10 seasons
01/02 7th (Champ)
02/03 16th
03/04 19th
04/05 13th
05/06 17th
06/07 15th
07/08 13th
08/09 5th P
09/10 18th (Prem) R
10/11 8th (Champ)

Top league scorers 2010/11
Jay Rodriguez 14, Chris Iwelumo 11, Chris Eagles 11, Graham Alexander 3, Jack Cork 3, Dean Marney 3, Ross Wallace 3.

In: Ben Mee (Manchester City, loan), Kieran Trippier (Manchester City, loan).

Out: Chris Iwelumo (Watford, undisclosed).

Last 10 managers
Brian Miller (Jun 86-Jan 89)
Frank Casper (Jan 89-Oct 91)
Jimmy Mallen (Oct 91-Apr 96)
Adrian Heath (Mar 96-Jun 97)
Chris Waddle (Jul 97-May 98)
Stan Ternent (Jun 98-Jun 04)
Owen Coyle (Nov 07-Jan 10)
Brian Laws (Jan 10-Dec 10)
Eddie Howe (Jan 11 -)

Celebrity fans
James Anderson (England cricketer), Alistair Campbell (former Labour spin doctor).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Burnley 3 Saints 2 (Skacel, Surman)
Saints 2 ((Wright-Phillips, McGoldrick) Burnley 2

Played for both Saints and Burnley
Steve Baker, Stephen Davis, Paul McDonald, Brian O'Neil, Malcolm Waldron, Nathan Dyer.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

CARDIFF

Ground: Cardiff City Stadium

Capacity: 26,828

Record attendance: 57,893 (Ninian Park) v Arsenal, First Division, Apr 1953

Nickname: Bluebirds

Last 10 seasons
01/02 4 (League 1)
02/03 6th P*
03/04 13th (Champ)
04/05 16th
05/06 11th
06/07 13th
07/08 12th
08/09 7th
09/10 4th
10/11 4th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Jay Bothroyd 18, Craig Bellamy 11, Pete Whittingham 11, Michael Chopra 9, Seyi Olofinjana 6, Chris Burke 5

In: Don Cowie (Watford, free), Rob Earnshaw (Nottingham Forest, free), Joe Mason (Plymouth Argyle, undisclosed), Aaron Gunnarson (Coventry City, free), Andrew Taylor (Middlesborough, free), Craig Conway (Dundee United, free), Kenny Miller (Bursaspor, £870,000), Filip Kiss (Slovan Bratislava, loan).

Out: Michael Chopra (Ipswich, £1.5m), Chris Burke (Birmingham, free), Jay Bothroyd (QPR, free).

Last 10 managers
Terry Yorath (Aug 94-Mar 95)
Kenny Hibbitt (Aug 96-Nov 96)
Russell Osman (Nov 96-Jan 98)
Frank Burrows (Feb 98-Feb 00)
Billy Ayre (Feb 00-Aug 00)
Bobby Gould (Aug 00-Jul 01)
Alan Cork (Jul 01-Feb 02)
Lennie Lawrence (Feb 02-May 05)
Dave Jones (May 05-May 11)
Malky Mackay (June 11-)

Celebrity fans
Phillip Schofield (TV presenter), Shakin Stevens (1980s pop singer).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 1 Cardiff 0 (McGoldrick)
Cardiff 2 Saints 1 (McGoldrick)

Played for both Saints and Bluebirds
Ian Baird, Ted Bates, Jason Bowen, Alan Curtis, Norman Dean, Frank Dudley, William Foulkes, Wilfred Grant, Kenneth Jones, Phil Kite, Robert McLaughlin, Russell Osman, Ernest Stevenson

All change for City

IT'S been all change at Cardiff this summer, but one familiar face has returned – and is hoping he can pick up where he left off.

With former Saints boss Dave Jones having been sacked following play-off failure last season, loanee Craig Bellamy back at Manchester City and with other key players having departed, it's been a big restructuring job for Malky Mackay, who left Watford to take over the Welsh side.

Mackay has already recruited some high calibre internationals such as Scottish international trio Kenny Miller, Don Cowie and Craig Conway and Icelander Aron Gunnarsson.

But it's the return of 30-year-old Robert Earnshaw after a seven-year absence that has got the Bluebirds fans buzzing.

The popular Welsh international striker scored 105 goals in 205 appearances for the club, including 31 league goals in 2002/03, and remains a huge hero.

Now he's back at City after his free transfer move from Nottingham Forest he is aiming to fire City into the top flight.

"People say 'don't go back' and that's why I took my time over the decision and thought about everything involved," reflected Earnshaw.

ROB EARNSHAW

"This had to be the right move for me at this stage of my career so it wasn't about letting the heart rule the head. I had to make sure it was right.

"But it did drive me when I imagined being part of a Cardiff City side that got promoted.

"Obviously I have history here and a lot of people have good memories of what I've done here – but I'm not worried about that changing.

"Whatever happens in the next two years won't affect what's gone before. People have been good to me when I've played against Cardiff – even when I've scored winners against them.

"I don't worry if I have a bad game or don't score that's going to change suddenly.

"That's not on my mind because all I need to do is keep producing. That would be the same whatever club I was at."

Earnshaw's time at Forest was frustrating due to the large amount of strikers at the City Ground, including ex-Saints pair Dexter Blackstock and David McGoldrick.

He added: "There was a big rotation system at Forest and a routine of every couple of games where things would be changed. That was tough for me to get going and because you want to play every game when you're fit.

"That was a big part of the reason why I came here, because I know I feel wanted here and I'm at the stage of my career where I want to play football and enjoy it.

"My record here is obviously good - but I know it will be a big ask to get into the 30s like I did before.

"I'm not going to score a million goals so perhaps expectation levels need to come down a bit.

"Of course, I want to score every game – but unless you are Lionel Messi, that's not going to happen.

"I want to score as many as I can, but the most important thing is not me but the team.

"Getting promoted here would be amazing.

"Our focus has got to be promotion."

Tough times for Thorn

FOOTBALL has its own world of sliding doors and what might have beens – just look at Coventry and Saints.

For so many years they were bracketed together as the over achievers of the Premier League, the underdogs who should never have survived but somehow did.

Coventry battled against relegation year after year in their antiquated Highfield Road ground, whilst Saints did the same in The Dell.

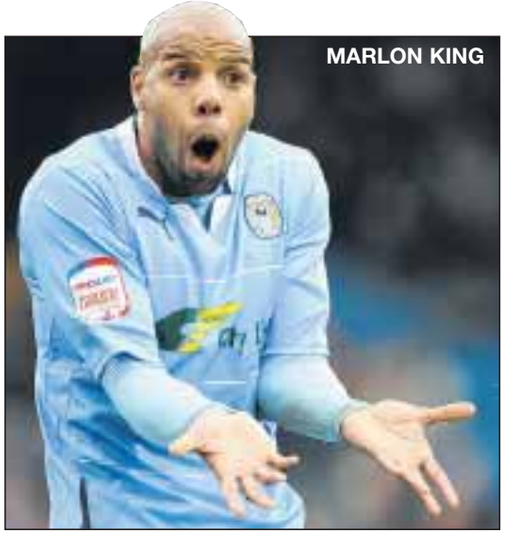
The clubs were a throwback to a passing age of football, small family clubs still operating in the same way as the money started to flow into the Premier League.

Inevitably both left for new stadiums and both became businesses as well as football clubs – both have suffered too and both were offered the same lifeline.

One accepted it, the other didn't, and it changed the course of history.

It was under the leadership of Jim Hone that Saints recommended a takeover offer from hedge fund SISU should be accepted in 2007 and they become the new owners at St Mary's.

It was rejected, the board left and the club ended up in administration before Markus Liebherr bought them.


MARLON KING

Coventry were not in a position to be as picky, as they were hours from administration when they accepted SISU's bid.

They remain in charge at the Ricoh Arena, and are apparently footing a loss of around £500,000 a month.

But after investment failed to get them to the Premier League, there are question marks surrounding the funding and whether another takeover may take place.

Coventry never sunk to League One, like Saints did, but the contrasting fortunes of the clubs are fascinating.

On the pitch it is the job of former Wimbledon FA Cup winner Andy Thorn, in his first managerial post, to steer a club that has already lost star players like Marlon King, Keiren Westwood and Aron Gunnarsson this summer, to prove wrong the bookies that have them among the favourites for relegation.

As a former member of the Crazy Gang, though, it is exactly the backs to the wall challenge Thorn relishes.

He said: "If people want to write us off I am not bothered about that.

"Let them think that because we are certainly not a team that will be lying down any more.

"It's all about us and what we do on the pitch now.

"We want all the players and the fans to stick together and then we can become an entirely different opponent."

Thorn added: "It's a big season for us but I don't really think about that fact that it is my first full season to be honest.

"My concern is making sure everything is right. If things are right on the pitch and we do well, everything else falls into place.

"I don't mind other people talking about us but we won't be talking about ourselves too much."

COVENTRY

Ground: Ricoh Stadium

Capacity: 32,500

Record attendance: 51,455 (Highfield Road) v Wolves, Second Division, Apr 1967.

Nickname: Sky Blues

Last 10 seasons
01/02 11th (Champ)
02/03 20th
03/04 12th
04/05 19th
05/06 8th
06/07 17th
07/08 21th
08/09 17th
09/10 19th
10/11 18th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Marlon King 12, Lucas Juthkiewicz 9, Gary McSheffrey 8, Fredy Eastwood 5

In: Joe Murphy (Scunthorpe, free), Chris Dunn (Northampton, undisclosed).

Out: Marlon King (Birmingham, free), Keiren Westwood (Sunderland, free), Isaac Osbourne (Aberdeen, free) Aaron Gunnarson (Cardiff City, free), Stephen O'Halloran (Carlisle United, free).

Last 10 managers
Gordon Strachan (Nov 96-Sep 01)
Roland Nilsson (Sep 01-Apr 02)
Gary McAllister (Apr 02-Dec 03)
Eric Black (Dec 03-May 04)
Peter Reid (Jun 04-Jan 05)
Micky Adams (Jan 05-Jan 07)
Iain Dowie (Feb 07-Feb 08)
Chris Coleman (Feb 08-May 10)
Adrian Boothroyd (May 10-March 11)
Andy Thorn (Mar 11-Present)

Celebrity fans
Jimmy Hill (television football pundit).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 1 Coventry 1 (McGoldrick)
Coventry 4 Saints 1 (McGoldrick)

Played for both Saints and Sky Blues
Mickey Adams, Edwin Brown, Ronald Ekelund, Tim Flowers, George Kirby, Tony Knapp, Chris Marsden, William Molloy, Carlton Palmer, Peter Shilton, David Speedie, Paul Telfer, Paul Williams, Dennis Wise, Leon Best, Martin Cranie.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

CRYSTAL PALACE

Ground: Selhurst Park

Capacity: 26,309

Record attendance: 51,482 v Burnley, Second Division, May 1979.

Nickname: Eagles

Last 10 seasons

01/02 10th (Champ)
02/03 14th
03/04 6th P*
04/05 18th (Prem) R
05/06 6th (Champ)
06/07 12th
07/08 5th
08/09 15th
09/10 21th
10/11 20th

Top league scorers 2010/11
James Vaughan 9, Darren Ambrose 7, Neil Danns 7, Owen Garvan 3

In: Glenn Murray (Brighton, free), Kagisho Dikgacoi (Fulham, undisclosed), Mile Jedinak (free), Jonathan Parr (Aalesund, undisclosed)

Out: Neil Danns, (Leicester, free), Adam Barrett (Bournemouth, free), Alassane N'Diaye (Southend United, loan).

Last 10 managers
Terry Venables (Jun 98 - Jan 99)
Steve Coppell (Jan 99 - Aug 00)
Alan Smith (Aug 00 - Apr 01)
Steve Bruce (May 01-Nov 01)
Trevor Francis (Nov 01-Apr 03)
Iain Dowie (Dec 03-May 06)
Peter Taylor (Jun 06-Oct 07)
Neil Warnock (Oct 07 - Mar 10)
George Burley (Jun 10 - Jan 11)
Dougie Freedman (Jan 11 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Mark Butcher (former England Test cricketer).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Crystal Palace 3 Saints 0
Saints 1 (McGoldrick) Crystal Palace 0

Played for both Saints and Palace
Mel Blyth, David Burnside, John Burridge, Kevin Dawtry, Mark Dennis, Iain Dowie, Gilbert Dowsett, Alfred Freeman, Terry Gennoe, Bernard Harrison, Thomas Lowder, Neil Ruddock, Tony Sealy , Neil Shipperley, George Smith, Jose Fonte, Stern John, Darren Powell.

Murray's a mint ...

DOUGIE Freedman has been acting a salesman as well as a manager for Crystal Palace this summer.

The Eagles are running on a very tight budget these days and the former player turned gaffer, who was put in charge shortly after ex-Saints boss George Burley was dismissed last January, is having to sell the club to potential signings.

He hasn't done a bad job, convincing Brighton's top scorer Glenn Murray to move to Selhurst Park despite interest from Saints, Millwall and Derby, as well as adding South African midfielder Kagisho Dikgacoi, Jonathan Parr and Mile Jedinak to his squad.

"Glenn's joined us from Brighton on a free transfer which is fantastic for us – he scored 20 odd goals for them last season," enthused Freedman.

"I've watched Glenn for a few years now, he's very comfortable on the ball and has good movement, and an eye for goal obviously.

"That'll be a good signing for us and everyone knows about KG (Dikgacoi) from last season."

STAR SIGNING: Glenn Murray.

Dikgacoi spent last season on loan at Palace from Fulham, and joined permanently this summer.

"The KG deal was the one that I was (really) looking to do. A mobile, central midfielder, 26 years of age, an international and can only get better.

"That's the (type of) signings we want to bring in and the most pleasing thing is that they both wanted to come and play for the club.

"Crystal Palace need to get to a level where we attract players that want to come to us.

"We no longer should go into the loan market or be paying over the odds for certain players.

"It will be my job to convince players to come and play here so we can get a good, hungry squad who want to play for the club."

The Palace departures this summer have included star midfielder Neil Danns, who opted to move to Leicester after no doubt becoming frustrated with Palace's two successive bottom six finishes, Adam Barrett and Alassane N'Diaye.

A key for Freedman this summer has been keeping hold of players, but he added: "We are a club on economy and we are not going to be throwing money at it, but I have got a budget and I have not hit that budget yet.

"We are actively trying to get a number of players in and I will keep on trying until we have a squad good enough to challenge in this division.

"I am in no rush to sell anybody."

Clough has to deliver

IT seems hard to believe it was only just over four years ago that Derby crushed Saints hearts on a sodden night in the East Midlands.

As the Rams held their nerve in a penalty shootout to knock out George Burley's side at Pride Park in the Championship play-off semi-final, so much went on to change for both clubs.

Derby would go on to reach the Premier League, only to end up going straight back down with the division's lowest ever points total – 11 – and only one win in the whole 2007/08 term.

Things were not much better for Saints, who eventually ended up in administration and in League One.

But now they are back in the same division again and both looking upwards.

Derby have not exactly hidden their ambitions this summer as eight signings – and counting – goes to show.

England under-21 goalkeeper Fielding has come in from Blackburn while the Rams are believed to have splashed out over £1m to bring in centre half Shackell from Barnsley.

Out have gone the likes of Robbie Savage (retired) and Luke Varney, who has moved to Portsmouth after spending last term on loan at Blackpool.

NEW FACE: Nathan Tyson, left.

Varney wasn't in favour last season, though – he spent 2010/11 on loan to Blackpool and in two and a half years at Pride Park only made five league appearances.

After a disappointing 19th placed finish last time out, Derby – just seven points clear of the drop zone come May - are aiming for much better

The investment in the squad cannot be questioned and it will now be over to Clough and his new look squad to deliver on the pitch.

Rams chairman and chief executive, Tom Glick, said: "Although we finished last season in a disappointing league position, we didn't think we were that far away and it was all about making some important adjustments this summer.

"Inward bound we want to add two more strikers up top."

Clough has already brought in two new strikers this summer – Scottish international Maguire, who scored 12 goals for Aberdeen last season, and Tyson, who made the short move from neighbours Nottingham Forest.

Tyson's switch was slightly controversial – the player was fined and banned by the FA for waving a flag in front of Derby fans after Forest's 3-2 win over the Rams in August 2009!

Glick continued: "Loans can be good, especially standard loans which run over half a season or a full season, and that was proven with the teams towards the top of the league last season who had a number of loan players in their squad to add to the quality they had on a permanent basis."

He was no doubt referring to the likes of Arsenal midfielder Henri Lansbury, who was on loan at Norwich, and 20-year-old Italian striker Fabio Borini, who provided late goals for Swansea while on loan from Chelsea.

DERBY

Ground: Pride Park

Capacity: 33,579

Record attendance: 41,826 (Baseball Ground) v Tottenham Hotspur, First Division, Sept 1969.

Nickname: Rams

Last 10 seasons
01/02 19th (Prem) R
02/03 18th (Champ)
03/04 20th
04/05 4th
05/06 20th
06/07 3rd P*
07/08 20th (Prem) R
08/09 18th (Champ)
09/10 14th
10/11 19th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Kris Commons 13, Alberto Bueno 5, Steve Davies 5, Jamie Ward 5, Tomasz Cywka 4, Luke Moore 4, Robbie Savage 4,

In: Frank Fielding (Blackburn, undisclosed), Theo Robinson (Millwall, undisclosed), Jamie Ward (Sheffield United, undisclosed), Craig Bryson (Kilmarnock, £450,000), Nathan Tyson (Nottingham Forest, free), Jason Shackell (Barnsley, undisclosed), Chris Maguire (Aberdeen, undisclosed) Adam Legzdins (Burton Albion, Undisclosed).

Out: Kallum Keane (Exeter, free), Ben Pringle (Rotherham, free), Luke Varney (Portsmouth, undisclosed).

Last 10 managers

Roy McFarland (Oct 93-Apr 95)
Jim Smith (Jun 95-Oct 01)
Colin Todd (Oct 01-Jan 02)
John Gregory (Jan 02-Mar 03)
George Burley (Mar 03-Jun 05)
Phil Brown (Jun 05-Jan 06)
Terry Westley (Jan 06-Jun 06)
Billy Davies (Jun 06-Nov 07)
Paul Jewell (Nov 07-Dec 08)
Nigel Clough (Jan 09-)

Celebrity fans
Margaret Beckett (Politician), Mike Cattermole (Horse-Racing presenter, Timothy Dalton (former James Bond actor), Simon Groom (ex-Blue Peter Presenter), Geoff Hoon (politician).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 1 Derby 1 (Perry)
Derby 0 Saints 1 (Surman)

Played for both Saints and Rams
Phil Boyer, Terry Curran, Gordon Brown, Peter Shilton, Mark Wright, John Burridge, Rory Delap, Charlie George, Trevor Hebberd, Danny Higginbotham, Grzegorz Rasiak, Inigo Idiakez, Thomasz Hajto.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

DONCASTER

Ground: Keepmoat Stadium

Capacity: 15,231

Record attendance: 37,149 (Belle Vue) v Hull City, Third Division North, Oct 1948

Nickname: Rovers

Last 10 seasons
01/02 4th (Conference)
02/03 3rd P
03/04 1st P (League 2)
04/05 10th (League 1)
05/06 8th
06/07 11th
07/08 3rd P
08/09 14th (Champ)
09/10 12th
10/11 21st

Top league scorers 2010/11
Billy Sharp 15, James Hayter 9, James Coppinger 7, Jason Euell 3, Dean Shields 3

In: Kyle Bennett (Bury, undisclosed), Tommy Spurr (Sheffield Wednesday, free), Richard Naylor (unattached), Ryan Mason (Tottenham, loan)

Out: Byron Webster (Northampton, free), Waide Fairhurst (Macclesfield, undisclosed), Wayne Thomas (released).

Last 10 managers

Mark Weaver (Aug 97-Oct 97
Danny Bergara (Oct 97-Dec 97
Mark Weaver (Dec 97-Dec 00
Ian Snodin (July 98-Apr 00
Dave Penney (Apr 00-May 00
Steve Wignall (May 00-Dec 01
Dave Penney (Dec 01-Aug 06
Sean O'Driscoll (Aug 06 -

Celebrity fans
Jeremy Clarkson (television presenter), Paul Daniels (magician).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Doncaster 0 (Mills og, Surman)
Saints 1 (Saganowski)
Doncaster 2

Played for both Saints and Rovers
Joseph Mills, Wayne Thomas, Simon Gillett

Billy's aim high

BILLY Sharp may have ended up staying at Doncaster rather than moving to Saints, but the striker insists he is still aiming for the top flight.

Saints had a £3.25m bid accepted for the 25-year-old striker but he opted to stay with Rovers rather than make the switch to the south coast.

There is little doubt that Doncaster's record signing is the star man in their ranks and their prospects for 2011/12 are hugely boosted by his presence.

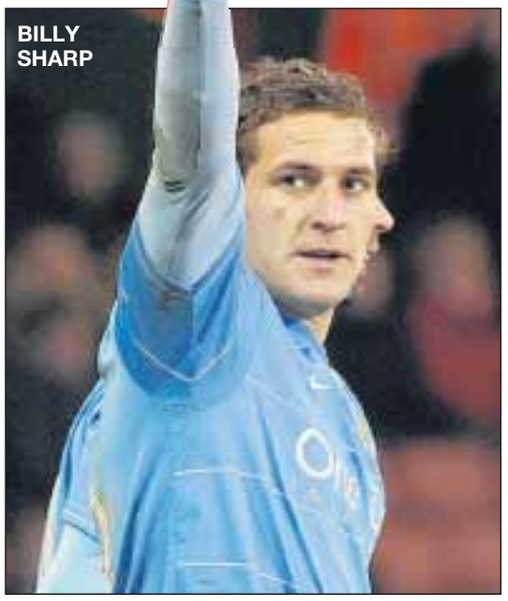
After all, he has scored 15 league goals in each of the last two second tier seasons for Rovers.

"Southampton are a big club and had the deal been right then I would have negotiated with them but it wasn't," he said.

"I knew Southampton manager Nigel Adkins, who I had played under at Scunthorpe.

"That was one of the positive aspects of their approach, but the deal wasn't right.

"It wasn't anything to do with being a Sheffield lad and not wanting to move out of the area.



BILLY SHARP

"I've been lucky in the two moves I've made (Scunthorpe and Doncaster) that I've not had to move, but it wouldn't be a problem if I did have to."

Sharp will no doubt be accused of lacking ambition in some quarters, particularly after seeing other Championship sharp-shooters make big summer moves, but he refutes that suggestion and believes that under ex-Cherries boss Sean O'Driscoll, who has recruited the likes Kyle Bennett from Bury and full-back Tommy Spurr from Sheffield Wednesday this summer, his club – non leaguers as recently as 2002/03 – can be more than mere relegation scrappers.

"It's not a case of me thinking that I am as good as them," he said of the players who have made their big moves.

"I just think myself that one day I will be good enough to play there.

"In the meantime I've got two years left on my contract and I'll be working as hard as I can during that time to both help the club and to try and get to the Premier League.

"I'm not in any rush to go and while ever I'm here I'll be giving 110 per cent to the club.

"I've been working hard on my fitness during the summer and I'll be ready to go when the season starts."

He added: "We've got to be relegation favourites after finishing fourth bottom last season.

"The three relegated teams are expected to do well and the three teams who have come up are supposedly going to be strong.

"But we are not going to go down. We've got to try and get off to a good start like we did last season and then hopefully build on that."

High of the Tigers?

NIGEL Pearson is aiming to prove his worth yet again as Hull push for promotion back to the Premier League.

The former Saints boss is still held in high esteem at St Mary's for his part in helping the club avoid relegation from the Championship in 2008 after being appointed by Leon Crouch.

When Rupert Lowe and Michael Wilde returned, they decided not to renew Pearson's contract and he went on to Leicester where he enjoyed huge success before making the switch to Hull.

The Tigers' late play-off push last season fell just short and they are hoping to go one better this time.

They have certainly been active in the transfer market with their big cash outlay being for Leicester defender Jack Hobbs, who was on loan at the KC Stadium last season.

He insists he has joined up with Pearson for their third time in his career to try and follow him into the top flight.

He said: "Our targets have to be promotion.

"Even with the bad start last season we managed to get within touching distance of the play-offs after going on such a good run.

EX-SAINTS BOSS: Nigel Pearson.

"This year promotion has to be the ultimate target.

"I'm sure that will be the case for a number of clubs but that's got to be our aim, to get back into the Premier.

"Hull are definitely a club that I feel can match my ambitions.

"When I came here last year it was because the club was pushing for the Premier League and I'd like to think we'll be doing the same again this year.

"The set-up of the club, the fans, the stadium, everything is in place.

"We'll be making sure we give absolutely everything we've got to achieve that goal.

"Everyone's ambitions are the same here – to be in the Premier League."

Meanwhile, another new signing, experienced striker Dele Adeobla, has also joined on a free transfer from Nottingham Forest and is aiming to add something different to an attack which can also include Pearson's ex-Leicester striker Matty Fryatt and former Peterborough ace Aaron McLean.

"I'd like to think I can bring a presence," he reckoned.

"Speaking to the staff, teams came here last season and sat back.

"Although this team has a lot of talent and a lot of pace, if a team has two banks sitting deep, how do you break them down?

"I can offer a different option. I can be used as a targetman or otherwise. The early part of the season will probably determine how I'm used but I'm ready to play my part."

HULL CITY

Ground: KC Stadium

Capacity: 25,404

Record attendance: 55,019 (Boothferry Park) v Manchester United, FA Cup sixth round, Feb 1949.

Nickname: Tigers

Last 10 seasons
01/02 11th (League 2)
02/03 13th
03/04 2nd P
04/05 2nd (League 1) P
05/06 18th (Champ)
06/07 21st
07/08 3rd P*
08/09 17th (Prem)
09/10 19th R
10/11 11th (Champ)

Top league scorers 2010/11
Matty Fryatt 9, Robert Koren 7, Jay Simpson 6, Nick Barmby 5, Anthony Gerrad 5.

In: Joe Dudgeon (Manchester United, undisclosed), Dele Adebola (Nottingham Forest, free), Jack Hobbs (Leicester, £850,000), Peter Gulasci (Liverpool, loan), Robbie Brady (Manchester United, loan)

Out: Nolberto Salano (Hartlepool, free), Mark Cullen (Bury, loan)

Last 10 managers
Stan Ternent (Nov 89 - Jan 91)
Terry Dolan (Jan 91 - Jul 97)
Mark Hateley (Jul 97 - Nov 98)
Warren Joyce (Nov 98 - Apr 00)
Brian Little (Apr 00 - Feb 02)
Jan Molby (Apr 02 - Oct 02)
Peter Taylor (Oct 02 - Jun 06)
Phil Parkinson (Jun 06 - Dec 06)
Phil Brown (Dec 06 - Mar 10)
Nigel Pearson (Jun 10 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Housemartins (musicians).

Last time they met Saints 2007/2008
Saints 4 Hull 0 (Wright-Phillips, John 3)
Hull 5 Saints 0

Played for both Saints and Tigers
Matthew Bound, Leonard Gaynor.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

IPSWICH

Ground: Portman Road

Capacity: 30,300

Record attendance: 38,010 v Leeds United, FA Cup sixth round, Mar 1975.

Nickname: Tractor Boys

Last 10 seasons
01/02 18th (Prem) R
02/03 7th (Champ)
03/04 5th
04/05 3rd
05/06 15th
06/07 14th
07/08 8th
08/09 9th
09/10 15th
10/11 13th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Jason Scotland 10, Connor Wickham 9, David Norris 8, Jimmy Bullard 5, Grant Leadbitter 5

In: Michael Chopra (Cardiff, £1.5m), Ivar Ingimarsson (Reading, free), Nathan Ellington (Watford, free), Aaron Cresswell (Tranmere, undisclosed), Jay Emmanuel-Thomas (Arsenal, undisclosed, David Stockdale (Fulham, loan).

Out: Gareth McAuley (West Brom, free), David Norris (Portsmouth, free), Connor Wickham (Sunderland, £8.1m), Troy Brown (Rotherham, free).

Last 10 managers
Bill McGarry (Oct 64 - Nov 68)
Bobby Rob55,019 (Boothferry park) v Manchester United, FA Cup sixth round, Feb 1949
son (Jan 69 - Jul 82)
Bobby Ferguson (Jul 82 - May 87)
John Duncan (Jun 87 - May 90)
John Lyall (May 90 - Dec 92)
George Burley (Dec 94 - Oct 02)
Joe Royle (Oct 02 - May 06)
Jim Magilton (Jun 06 - Apr 09)
Roy Keane (Apr 09 - Jan 11)
Paul Jewell (Jan 11 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Griff Rhys Jones (television personality), Kevin Painter (darts player).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 2 (Surman, Pekhart)
Ipswich 2
Ipswich 0 Saints 3 (Euell 2, Paterson)

Played for both Saints and Tractor Boys
Colin Clarke, Wilfred Grant Richard Hall, Ian Juryeff, Jim Magilton

One final hurrah ...

LEE Bowyer is hoping for one last hurrah in his career at Ipswich.

The former England midfielder decided to move to the Tractor Boys after his Birmingham contract expired and the Blues were relegated from the Premier League.

Bowyer, 34, has signed a one-year deal at Portman Road with the option of a further 12-month extension.

His arrival looks another astute signing by Paul Jewell who is building a squad of quality but also experience.

His other summer signings includes players with plenty of proven knowhow at Championship level such as Nathan Ellington, Michael Chopra, Aaron Cresswell and Ivar Ingimarsson.

And they look like they will be a force.

Bowyer said: "I met up with the manager and it was clear that I'm joining an ambitious club.

"I have the same ambitions. I'm not looking to join a club that is happy in mid-table. I have always played to win and I'm no different now.

STILL AMBITIOUS: Lee Bowyer, left.

"Ipswich are aiming for promotion and I'm here to play my part in trying to make that happen.

"I have played most of my football in the Premier League and it would be nice to finish my career at that level with Ipswich.

"I know I'm 34 but fitness is not a problem for me. My Pro Zone stats stood up against much younger team-mates of mine at Birmingham last season and in the opposition as well.

"There were other clubs interested, Premier League clubs, but Ipswich is a good move for me.

"I started my career at a family club in Charlton and perhaps I'll end it at a family club in Ipswich but it would be nice to go out on a high.

"That's the aim coming here. I'm still ambitious. I want to win and I want to help Ipswich win."

Jewell believes the business Ipswich have done has been good given the state of finances in football these days.

"I'm happy with what we've done so far, the players we have brought in and there are more to come," he said.

"It's been a hard summer, with lots of phone calls and travelling but we are getting there.

"We've signed some really good players but it's not all rosy in the garden, we want to bring more in.

"Times are hard in football, though, just like they are outside the game.

"There is not loads of money around to buy players, in the Championship anyway, but whenever I have asked the owner to spend, he has said yes.

"It's a case of getting the right players at the right price and the owner will always listen to what I have to say."

Twitter woe for Leeds

SIMON Grayson has been a man juggling problems this summer – one of which has led to a Twitter ban for his players.

The Leeds boss is hoping to have a real crack at promotion but has found new players hard to come by with Blackpool goalkeeper Paul Rachubka and Michael Brown, the midfielder released by Portsmouth, coming in while the likes of goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel and midfielder Bradley Johnson have departed to fellow Championship clubs.

On top of that, Grayson has suffered two injury blows in the striking department.

Luciano Becchio – 19 goals last season in the Championship, only three strikers scored more - looks like missing the start of the season after picking up an injury in pre-season.

And Davide Somma has torn his cruciate ligament, meaning he will be ruled out for at least six months.

As if that wasn't bad enough for Grayson, he was livid when details of Somma's injury were revealed by the player on Twitter before he had had the chance to tell all those who needed to be informed.

INJURED: Luciano Becchio (left).

That has led to Grayson banning his players from using the social networking site altogether.

"We have a club policy that players are banned from leaking any information. It shouldn't have come out like that," he said.

"It should have been left to me to deal with, hence why from now on all players will be banned from using that sort of network.

"It has caused too many problems for other clubs and other players and we had strict rules about Twitter, which were put in place halfway through last season.

"There were certain people at the club who didn't know (about Somma's injury) and they should have been told before the people on that website.

"There will be major implications for any player caught using it."

The injuries to Becchio and Somma could give a chance to former Swindon Town star Billy Paynter.

Paynter belted over 20 goals for the Wiltshire club in 2009/10, the season they lost the League 1 play-off final to Millwall.

He joined Leeds on a free last summer but a shin injury restricted him to just eight starts plus 14 off the bench, during which he only scored once.

Leeds' second top scorer last season was winger Max Gradel, who had a loan spell at Cherries in 2007/08, with 18.

That has led to summer speculation linking him with West Ham.

But chairman Ken Bates said: "Nobody is leaving Leeds. We've had one offer for a player and we said no.

"There are rumours you read in the papers, that this club is going to offer x for someone and y for someone else. It's all newspaper talk or agents trying to stimulate interest."

LEEDS

Ground: Elland Road

Capacity: 40,204

Record attendance: 57,892 v Sunderland, FA Cup sixth round, Mar 1949.

Nickname: Whites

Last 10 seasons
01/02 5th (Prem)
02/03 15th
03/04 19th R
04/05 14th (Champ)
05/06 5th
06/07 24th R
07/08 5th (League 1)
08/09 4th
09/10 2nd P
10/11 7th (Champ)

Top league scorers 2010/11
Luciano Becchio 19, Max Gradel 18, Davide Somma 11, Jonathon Howson 10, Robert Snodgrass 6

In: Paul Rachubka (Blackpool, free), Michael Brown (unattached), Andy Lonergan (Preston, undisclosed).

Out: Kasper Schmeichal (Leicester, undisclosed), Neil Kilkenny (Bristol City, free), Bradley Johnson (Norwich, free).

Last 10 managers
Howard Wilkinson (Oct 88 - Sep 96)
George Graham (Sep 96 - Oct 98)
David O'Leary (Oct 98 - Jun 02)
Terry Venables (Jul 02 - Mar 03)
Peter Reid (Mar 03 - Nov 03)
Eddie Gray (Nov 03 - May 04)
Kevin Blackwell (Jun 04 - Sep 06)
Dennis Wise (Oct 06 - Jan 08)
Gary McAllister (Jan 08 - Dec 08)
Simon Grayson (Dec 08 0 Present)

Celebrity fans
Mel B (Spice Girl), Nasser Hussain (former England cricketer), Chris Moyles (Radio 1 DJ).

Last time they met Saints 2009/2010
Saints 1 Leeds 0 (Harding)
Leeds 1 Saints 0

Played for both Saints and Leeds
Mickey Adams, Ian Andrews, Ian Baird, Alan Curtis, Frank Dudley, William Heaton, Joe Jordan, George O'Brien, Dan Harding

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

LEICESTER

Ground: King Power Stadium

Capacity: 32,500

Record attendance: 47,298 (Filbert St) v Tottenham Hotspur, FA Cup fifth round, Feb 1928.

Nickname: Foxes

Last 10 seasons
01/02 20th (Prem) R
02/03 2nd (Champ) P
03/04 18th (Prem) R
04/05 15th (Champ)
05/06 16th
06/07 19th
07/08 22nd R
08/09 1st (League 1) P
09/10 5th (Champ)
10/11 10th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Andy King 15, Yakubu 11, Paul Gallagher 10, Kyle Naughton 5, Steve Howard 4, Darius Vassel 4, Martyn Waghorn 4

In: Lee Peltier (Huddersfield, undisclosed), Neil Danns (Crystal Palace, free), Kasper Schmeichal (Leeds, undisclosed), David Nugent (Portsmouth, free), Sean St Ledger (Preston, undisclosed), Matt Mills (Reading, £5m), Paul Konchesky (Liverpool, undisclosed), John Pantsil (unattached), Michael Johnson (Manchester City, loan).

Out: Craig King (Telford, free), Jack Hobbs (Hull, £850,000), Cian Bolger (Bristol Rovers, loan), Conrad Logan (Rotherham, loan), Tom Parkes (Burton, loan).

Last 10 managers
Mark McGhee (Dec 94 - Dec 95)
Martin O'Neill (Dec 95 - Jun 00)
Peter Taylor (Jun 00 - Sep 01)
Dave Basset (Oct 01 - Apr 02)
Micky Adams (Apr 02 - Oct 04)
Craig Levein (Nov 04 - Jan 06)
Rob Kelly (Jan 06 - Apr 07)
Ian Holloway (Nov 07 - May 08)
Nigel Pearson (Jun 08 - Jun 10)
Sven-Goran Eriksson (Oct 10 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Engelbert Humperdinck (singer), Martin Johnson (England rugby World Cup winner).

Last time they met Saints 2007/2008
Saints 1 Leicester 0 (John)
Leicester 1 Saints 2 (John, Surman)

Played for both Saints and Lelcester
Ian Andrews, Tim Flowers, Michael Gilkes, Gerald Gurr, Trevor Hebberd, Steve Moran, Carlton Palmer, Peter Shilton, David Speedie, Matt Oakley.

Hey big spenders!

WHILE Saints fans got used to their side being the big spenders of League One, it is Leicester who have led the way in the Championship this summer.

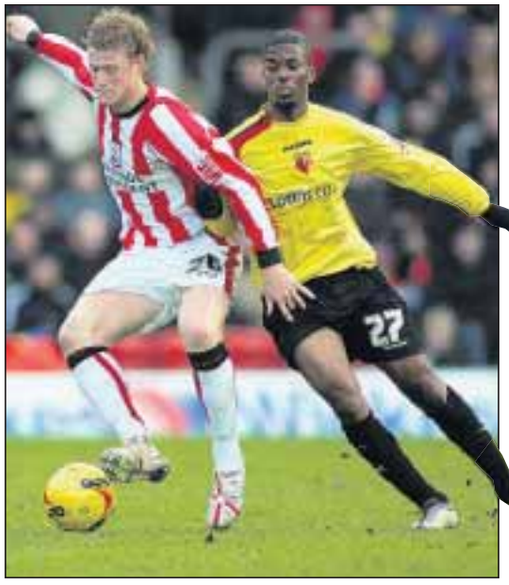
With Sven-Goran Eriksson as manager, a home pre-season friendly against Real Madrid lined up and a host of big money signings, cash is clearly not in short supply at the King Power Stadium.

Leicester want promotion and they are chucking everything they have at getting it.

In have come the likes of former Saints defender Matt Mills, for £5m, Kasper Schmeichel, Lee Peltier, former Portsmouth and England striker David Nugent, Neil Danns, Sean St Ledger and Paul Konchesky.

Eriksson's former Manchester City defender Michael Johnson, who has arrived on a season long loan, this week became the club's ninth pre-season addition.

As a result, Vichai Raksriaksorn, the Thai millionaire behind the Asian Football Investments consortium's takeover last summer along with his brother Aiyawatt, will be happy with nothing else but promotion.



EX-SAINT: New Leicester defender Matt Mills.

Eriksson said this week of the club's owners: "They want to take Leicester City up to the Premier League and they want to stay there, to start with.

"For me, that is a big, big challenge."

Eriksson knows his summer signings have heightened the anticipation around the club.

"It's football we are talking about, it's not science. Football can go wrong, it can go well. But why should it go wrong?" he asked.

"I am sure we have a better team this season than we had last season.

"Last season was not brilliant, but it was far away from a disaster."

One of the players already at the club, Andy King, knows there can be no excuses for failure this season.

"To have the high-quality players who have been brought in is going to give us as good a chance as we could possibly have," he said.

"The support of the owners has been outstanding and we can't ask for any more than that.

"All the things they have been doing with the training ground and the quality they have brought in just shows they are putting their faith in us.

"Hopefully we can repay that on the pitch.

"It is down to us and they have done all that could possibly have been asked of them."

Leicester ended last season in good form, helped by some Premiership loans such as Yakubu (from Everton), Diomansy Kamara (Fulham) and Jeffrey Bruma (Chelsea).

But all three of those have returned to the parent clubs.

Boro tighten belts ...

MIDDLESBROUGH were for so long known as a team so richly bankrolled by a wealthy owner,but even they are having to tighten their belts in the straitened times.

Tony Mowbray is still hoping to get Boro back to the top flight, but after acquisitions backed by chairman Steve Gibson that failed to work out under former Saints boss Gordon Strachan, the wage bill is being cut back.

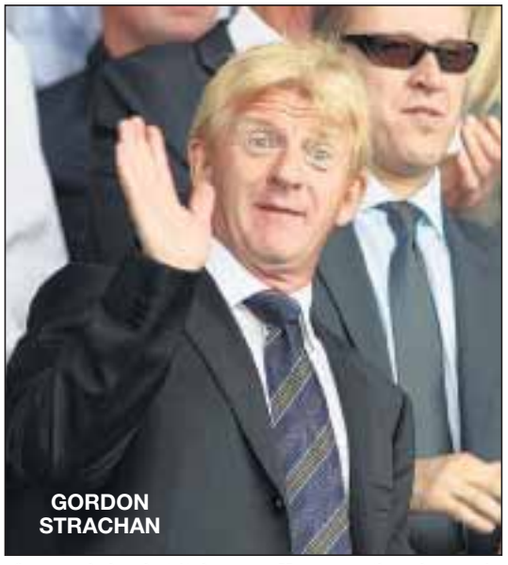
Last season's player of the year, defender Julio Arca, was released after his contract ended while the Scottish Premier League's record goalscorer, Kris Boyd, was recently sold to Turkish club Eskisehirspor for an undisclosed fee.

Boyd was signed by Strachan from Glasgow Rangers on Premier League wages in February 2010 but ended last season on loan to Nottingham Forest.

"We have to reduce our annual wage bill by a certain amount of money," admitted Mowbray, whose arrival on Teesside after Strachan's resignation in October of last year helped guide the club to survival.

"Losing a certain amount of money helps, but it doesn't get us anywhere near to where we want to be.

"We can't, for example, just go and spend Julio's (Arca) saving because it just adds it on again. I don't want to say nobody's coming in, but it's unlikely until we have outgoings."



GORDON STRACHAN

However, the players in Mowbray's young squad have reacted well to his methods and his passing ethos and they at least are confident about their prospects.

Defender Seb Hines said: "We finished the season with a lot of confidence and hopefully the fans have a lot more confidence in us too.

"All the lads now are just really excited for the start of the season.

"We're definitely going to be pushing for promotion and we've shown we can match any team in this league when we're at our best.

"The more the games we won the more the confidence flowed through the team.

"It just worked and when we found out we were safe from relegation we felt the shackles were off and we could play with more freedom and it showed."

Boro ended 2010/11 with four straight wins, including a 3-0 success at Cardiff that virtually ended the home side's chances of automatic promotion.

In all, Boro won seven of their last 12 games, drawing four and losing just one.

Despite that run, they still only finished 12th.

Boro will have to start the season with second choice No 1 Danny Coyne in goal after England under-21 keeper Jason Steele broke a wrist in training earlier this month.

MIDDLESBROUGH

Ground: Riverside

Capacity: 35,100

Record attendance: 53,802 (Ayresome Park) v Newcastle United, First Division, Dec 1949.

Nickname: Boro

Last 10 seasons
01/02 20th (Prem) R
02/03 2nd (Champ) P
03/04 18th (Prem) R
04/05 15th (Champ)
05/06 16th
06/07 19th
07/08 22nd R
08/09 1st (League 1) P
09/10 5th (Champ)
10/11 10th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Leroy Lita 12, Scott McDonald 12, Kris Boyd 6, Barry Robson 5, Tarmo Kink 4

In: Curtis Main (Darlington, free), Malaury Martin (unattached)

Out: Didier Digard (Nice, undisclosed), Andrew Taylor (Cardiff, free), Willo Flood (Dundee, free), Julio Arca (released), Kris Boyd (Eskisehirspor, undisclosed).

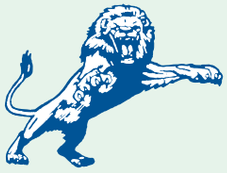
Last 10 managers
Willie Madden (Jun 84-Feb 86)
Bruce Rioch (Feb 86-Mar 90)
Colin Todd (Mar 90-Jun 91)
Lennie Lawrence (Jul 91-May 94)
Bryan Robson (May 94-Dec 00)
Terry Venables (Dec 00-Jun 01)
Steve McClarren (Jun 01-May 06)
Gareth Southgate (Jun 06-Oct 09)
Gordon Strachan (Oct 09-Oct 10)
Tony Mowbray (Oct 10 -)

Celebrity fans
Bob Mortimer (comedian), Chris Rea (singer).

Last time they met Saints 2004/2005
Saints 2 (Phillips, Crouch)
Middlesborough 2 (Phillips, Middlesborough 1 Saints 3 (Jakobsson, Crouch 2)

Played for both Saints and Boro
Ian Andrews, David Armstrong, Ian Baird, David Chadwick, Jon Gittens, Phil Kite, Neil Maddison, Andy Townsend, Charles Wayman, Jason Euell, Scott McDonald.

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP



MILLWALL

Ground: The New Den

Capacity: 20,146

Record attendance: 48,672 v Derby County, FA Cup fifth round, Feb 1937.

Nickname: Lions

Last 10 seasons
01/02 4th (Champ)
02/03 9th
03/04 10th
04/05 10th
05/06 23rd R
06/07 10th (League 1)
07/08 17th
08/09 5th
09/10 3rd P
10/11 9th (Champ)

Top league scorers 2010/11
Steve Morrison 15, Liam trotter 7, James Henry 5, Jason Puncheon 5, Kevin Lisbie 4, John Marquis 4

In: Ryan Allsop (West Brom, undisclosed), Therry Racon (Charlton, free), Darius Henderson (Sheffield United, undisclosed)

Out: Theo Robinson (Derby, undisclosed), John Sullivan (Charlton, free), Steve Morison (Norwich, undisclosed), Neil Harris (Southend, free), Ashley Grimes (Rochdale, free), Andy Frampton (Gillingham, undisclosed), Marc Laird (Leyton Orient, undisclosed)

Last 10 managers
Billy Bonds (May 97-May 98)
Keith Stevens (May 98-Sep 00)
Alan McLeary (May 99-Sep 00)
Mark McGhee (Sep 00-Oct 03)
Dennis Wise (Oct 03-May 05)
Colin Lee (Jul 05-Dec 05)
David Tuttle (Dec 05-Apr 06)
Nigel Spackman (May 06-Sep 06)
Willie Donachie (Sep 06-Oct 07)
Kenny Jackett (Nov 07 -)

Celebrity fans
Danny Baker (television/radio presenter), Frank Maloney (boxing promoter).

Last time they met Saints 2009/2010
Saints 1 Millwall 1 (Paterson)
Millwall 1 Saints 1 (Lambert)

Played for both Saints and Lions
Paul Allen, Mel Blyth, Anthony Byrne, Andy Cook, Kevin Davies, Ron Davies, Kerry Dixon, Michael Gilkes, Austin Hayes, Terry Hurlock. George Lawrence, Paul Moody, Neil Ruddock, Frank Saul, David Wallace, Russell Watkinson, Peter Wells, Steve Wood, Jason Puncheon

Bucking the trend

IN the days when modern footballers are often accused of putting financial gain before their own career prospects, Millwall have signed a player who has bucked the trend.

Darius Henderson has reportedly taken a £9,000 a week pay cut to leave relegated Sheffield United and join the Lions.

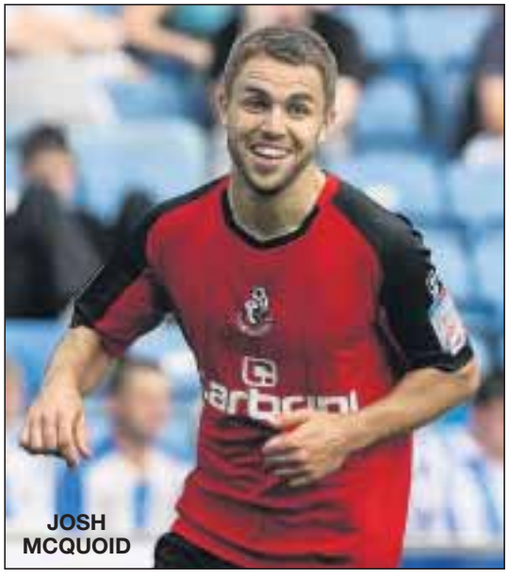
The 29-year-old, who missed much of last season through injury, could have stayed at Bramall Lane and continued to coin in £15,000 per week.

But instead, wanting to play, and feeling responsible for United's drop, he has left.

"Last season was the worst of my career," he said. "I hold myself personally responsible for United's relegation because I didn't play enough games or score enough goals to help keep them up.

"I would have been happy to stay in Sheffield but, equally, I didn't want to be a drain on their finances."

Henderson has been a thorn in Saints' side before – he netted three goals in two games against George Burley's men for Watford in 2005/06 and grabbed two more when Saints lost 3-2 at Vicarage Road in the 2007/08 campaign.



JOSH MCQUOID

Meanwhile, Lions boss Kenny Jackett is continuing to go about his business in typically undemonstrative fashion.

As well as Henderson, he has recruited the likes of England under-17 keeper Ryan Allsop from West Brom and midfielder Therry Racon form Charlton, who was attracting interest from Crystal Palace and Bristol City.

Going out have been winger Theo Robinson, keeper John Sullivan, striker Ashley Grimes and Andy Frampton.

The main loss, however, is Welsh international striker Steve Morison.

Just two years after Jackett signed the forward from then non league Stevenage Borough, Morison won a multi-million pound move to Premiership newcomers Norwich.

He was the Lions' leading scorer last season with 15 in what was his first ever term in the Championship.

Morison's departure, though, could lead the way for ex-Cherries striker Josh McQuoid to get more chances to shine.

The 21-year-old was snapped up by the Lions for around £500,000 after 12 goals in a 17-match league and cup spell for the Dorset club.

Initially joining Millwall on loan, the Southampton-born Northern Ireland international made the move permanent in January.

Big Premiership link

STEVE McClaren is trying to revive Nottingham Forest into a top flight giant once again – and wants to do it with a blend of experienced players and young home grown talent.

The former England boss took over at the City Ground this summer and has found plenty of talented youngsters waiting for a chance.

He is desperately trying to sign a bit of experience to go alongside them and has recruited the likes of Andy Reid and Jonathan Greening.

And he has an idea of how he wants to achieve success.

"Young players coming through into the first team from the academy is the heart and soul of your club," reckoned McClaren.

"Manchester United, Middlesbrough and FC Twente all have a great tradition of bringing players through.

"And that was one of the attractions of Forest. They do that as well.

"From what I hear, we have very good young players coming through at every level.

"What we need to do is develop now and make them the heart and soul of the club."

It could take McClaren time to readjust to the pace of the Championship after managing abroad but he is ready for the challenge that awaits.

STEVE McCLAREN

"It is a big league. The Premier League and the Championship intertwine now," he said.

"They never used to, but now they feel as though there is a link.

"You see big teams in this division. You see sides that should be in the Premier League.

"Clubs with big supports and great stadiums.

"And there are some pretty big managers as well, which makes it even more competitive.

"I said it when I came back. the Championship is a very good league and is very well respected, even abroad.

"In terms of attendances, it is right up there. It has the fifth or sixth highest in Europe.

"The key thing with English football is that it is the best league – it is the most passionate.

"Everyone abroad wants to come to England. It is where people want to coach, to manage and to play.

"That has always been an attraction here."

McClaren believes that West Ham will be the team to beat in the Championship this season.

"In golf you have 'gimmes'. In the Championship, West Ham are probably a 'gimme'," he admitted.

"They have made a big statement with the capture of Kevin Nolan. He won't have come cheap.

"They are going for it.

"They want to do a Newcastle by keeping their squad strong and trying to blow this league away.

"When you look at their financial position, it is very, very difficult to compete with that kind of resource.

"There will be pressure on them. They have to do it.

"There are a lot of good teams in this division, there will be a lot of competitive sides."

NOTTM FOREST

Ground: The City Ground

Capacity: 30,602

Record attendance: 49,946 v Manchester United, First Division, Oct 1967.

Nickname: Forest

Last 10 seasons
01/02 16th (Champ)
02/03 6th
03/04 14th
04/05 23rd R
05/06 7th (League 1)
06/07 4th
07/08 2nd P
08/09 19th (Champ)
09/10 3rd
10/11 6th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Lewis McGuagan 13, Robert Earnshaw 8, Marcus Tudgay 7, Kris Boyd 6, Luke Chambers 6, Dexter Balckstock 5, David McGoldrick 5

In: Andy Reid (Blackpool, free), Jonathan Greening (Fulham, undisclosed), George Boateng (unattached).

Out: Nathan Tyson (Derby, free), Mark Byrne (Barnet, free), Rob Earnshaw (Cardiff, free), Dele Adebola (Hull, free), Julian Bennett (Sheffield Wednesday, free)

Last 10 managers
Stuart Pearce (Dec 96-May 97)
Dave Bassett (May 97-Jan 99)
Ron Atkinson (Jan 99-May 99)
David Platt (Jul 99-Jul 01)
Paul Hart (Jul 01-Feb 04)
Joe Kinnear (Feb 04-Dec 04)
Gary Megson (Jan 05-Feb 06)
Colin Calderwood (May 06-Dec 08)
Billy Davies (Jan 09 -Jun 11)
Steve McClaren (Jun 11 -)

Celebrity fans
James Dean Bradfield (singer, Manic Street Preachers), Lee Westwood (golfer), Ken Clarke (politician).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 0 Nottm Forest 2
Nottm Forest 3 Saints 1 (Wright-Phillips)

Played for both Saints and Forest
Ian Andrews, David Beasant, Francis Benali, Terry Curran, John Edwards
Bernard Elliott, Justin Fashanu, Charlie George, Tony Knapp, Jim Montgomery, Carlton Palmer, Peter Shilton, Neil Shipperley, Dexter Blackstock, David McGoldrick

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

POMPEY

Ground: Fratton Park

Capacity: 20,700

Record attendance: 51,385 v Derby County, FA Cup sixth round, Feb 1949.

Nickname: Pompey

Last 10 seasons
01/02 17th (Champ)
02/03 1st P
03/04 13th (Prem)
04/05 16th
05/06 17th
06/07 9th
07/08 8th
08/09 14th
09/10 20th R
10/11 16th (Champ)

Top league scorers 2010/11
David Nugent 13, Dave Kitson 8, Liam Lawerence 7, Greg Halford 5, John Utaka 3, Joel Ward 3

In: David Norris (Ipswich, free), Jason Pearce (Bournemouth, £450,000), Luke Varney (Derby, undisclosed), Greg Halford (Wolves, undisclosed)

Out: Marlon Pack (Cheltenham, free), Darryl Flahavan (Bournemouth, free), David Nugent, (Leicester, free)

Last 10 managers
Steve Claridge (Oct 00-Feb 01)
Graham Rix (Feb 01-Mar 02)
Harry Redknapp (Mar 02-Nov 04)]
Velimir Zajec (Nov 04-Apr 05)
Alain Perrin (Apr 05-Nov 05)
Harry Redknapp (Dec 05-Oct 08)
Tony Adams (Oct 08-Feb 09)
Paul Hart (Feb 09-Nov 09)
Avram Grant (Nov 09-May 10)
Steve Cotterill (Jun 10 -)

Celebrity fans
Ian Darke (radio presenter).

Last time they met Saints 2004/2005
Saints 2 (Blackstock, Phillips)
Portsmouth 1
Portsmouth 4 Saints 1 (Camara)

Played for both Saints and Pompey
Ian Baird, David Beasant, John Beresford, William Bevis, Thomas Bushby, Mike Channon, Colin Clarke, Eamonn Collins, Andy Cook, Ron Davies, Paul Gilchrist, Jon Gittens, Ivan Golac, David Gunter, Bernard Harrison, Trevor Hebberd, Scott Hiley, Barry Horne, George Lawrence, Alan McLoughlin, Harry Penk, Matthew Richardson, Bobby Stokes, Jhon Viafara, Ricardo Fuller, Peter Crouch, Nigel Quashie, Martin Cranie.

MOUTH-WATERING!

EXCITEMENT is bound to reach fever pitch as the day draws ever closer for the first Saints v Pompey derby of 2011/12.

Most will be hoping that those feelings don't boil over again, as they have done in recent times.

But one thing is for sure – there will not be much festive cheer on offer in Fratton Park when Saints travel there a week before Christmas for the first league derby between the club since April 2005.

The prospect is mouth watering and no doubt will be a highlight of the pre-Christmas build-up for supporters of both clubs.

But both have plenty of work and plenty of games to play before then.

For Pompey boss Steve Cotterill it has been a case of waiting patiently until the ownership wrangles at the club were sorted out and then trying to quickly build a squad for the upcoming season after starting with not that many more senior pros than you need to field a team.

Cotterill, though, has proved himself an astute mover in the transfer market during his career.

He knows he already has experience at the club such as Liam Lawrence, Dave Kitson and even Kanu.

What he needs to go along with that, and some exciting youngsters, is more good, solid pros.

If he is not going to have the biggest squad, he needs to have a very effective one.

And the signings of the likes of David Norris, Jason Pearce and Luke Varney suggest that is what he's aiming for.

Norris and Varney know what the second tier is about while Pearce returns to Fratton Park after excelling in recent seasons with Cherries.

"I'm very pleased with what we've got," said Cotterill. "The lads that have come in have gelled well with the ones that were already here.

"David Lampitt (chief executive) knows the players I'm after. I'm in contact with him and we're working hard to get some deals over the line.

"I'm happy with how pre-season has gone."

Meanwhile, talented centre half Joel Ward has targeted a promotion tilt.

That might seem more than a bit ambitious given Pompey finished 16th last term, 17 points outside the play-off zone.

"We want to be in contention for the top six," said the 21-year-old.

"We want to give it everything we've got, and that's the main thing we're going to do – we're going to give it 100 per cent every week, and hopefully that pays off.

"As the squad grows and we get a few additions, the team will get a lot stronger.

"We're feeling fitter and a lot sharper, looking good in training and we are building for the future.

"Hopefully, we can keep doing that and go out there and be competitive."

VERY PLEASED: Pompey boss Steve Cotterill. Inset left – new signing Jason Pearce in pre-season friendly action against Chelsea's Didier Drogba

POMPEY FIXTURES 2011/12

August
6 Middlesbrough ....(A)
13 Brighton .....(H)
16 Reading .....(H)
20 Bristol City .....(A)
27 Cardiff .....(H)

September
10 West Ham .....(A)
17 Hull .....(A)
24 Blackpool .....(H)
27 Peterborough .....(H)

October
1 Leeds .....(A)
15 Barnsley .....(H)
18 Ipswich .....(A)
22 Doncaster .....(H)
29 Derby .....(A)

November
1 Crystal Palace .....(A)
5 Nottm Forest .....(H)
19 Watford .....(A)
26 Leicester .....(H)
29 Birmingham .....(A)

December
3 Coventry .....(H)
10 Burnley .....(A)
17 Southampton .....(H)
26 Millwall .....(A)
31 Leicester .....(A)

January
2 Watford .....(H)
14 West Ham .....(H)
21 Cardiff .....(A)
31 Peterborough .....(A)

February
4 Hull .....(H)
11 Blackpool .....(A)
14 Ipswich .....(H)
18 Barnsley .....(A)
25 Leeds .....(H)

March
3 Middlesbrough .....(H)
6 Reading .....(A)
10 Brighton .....(A)
17 Bristol City .....(H)
20 Birmingham .....(H)
24 Coventry .....(A)
31 Burnley .....(H)

April
7 Southampton .....(A)
9 Millwall .....(H)
14 Doncaster .....(A)
17 Crystal Palace .....(H)
21 Derby .....(H)
28 Nottm Forest .....(A)

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

PETERBOROUGH

Ground: London Road

Capacity: 15,314

Record attendance: 30,096 v Swansea Town, FA Cup fifth round, Feb 1965.

Nickname: Posh

Last 10 seasons
01/02 17th (League 1)
02/03 11th
03/04 18th
04/05 23rd R
05/06 9th (League 2)
06/07 10th
07/08 2nd P
08/09 2nd P (League 1)
09/10 24th R (Champ)
10/11 4th (League 1) P

Top league scorers 2010/11
Craig Mackail-Smith 27, George Boyd 15, Aaron Maclean 10, Grant McCann 9, Lee Tomlin 8

In: Paul Jones (Exeter, free), Nicky Ajose (Manchester United, undisclosed), Ryan Tunnicliffe (Manchester United, loan), Scott Wootton (Manchester United, loan).

Out: Charlie Lee (Gillingham, undisclosed), Craig Mackail-Smith (Brighton, undisclosed), Chris Whelpdale (Gillingham, undisclosed), Rene Howe (Torquay, free)

Last 10 managers
John Still (Aug 94 - Oct 95)
Mick Halsall (Oct 95 - Jul 96)
Barry Fry (Aug 96 - May 05)
Mark Wright (May 05 - Jan 06)
Steve Bleasdale (Jan 06 - May 06)
Keith Alexander (May 06 - Jan 07)
Darren Ferguson (Jan 07 - Nov 09)
Mark Cooper (Nov 09 - Feb 10)
Gary Johnson (Apr 10 - Jan 11)
Darren Ferguson (Jan 11 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Adrian Durham (radio presenter).

Last time they met Saints 2010/2011
Saints 4 ((Barnard, Fonte Chaplow, Do Prado)
Peterborough 1
Peterborough 4 Saints 4 (Chaplow, Lambert 2 pens, Hammond)

Played for both Saints and Posh
Keith Cassells, Colin Clarke, Terence Simpson.

Nothing to prove

PETERBOROUGH insist they have nothing to prove on their return to the Championship.

This season will mark the second time Darren Ferguson has led his promotion winners into the second tier.

Last time, after back-to-back elevations, it turned sour.

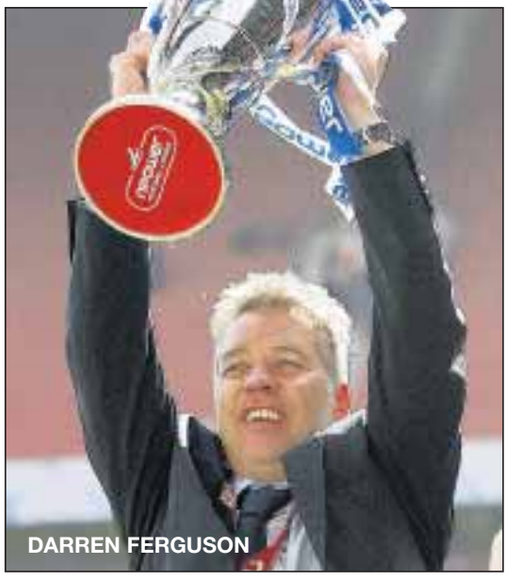
Posh, and the players who had earned such big reputations as they sailed through the leagues, flopped.

Ferguson himself left the club with the side bottom of the Championship in 2009/10 and, after getting through more managers, they were eventually sent straight back to League One.

Ferguson has since rejoined and last season took his free scoring side to promotion once more, this time via the play-offs.

You might think then that Ferguson, and the players that remain from the last time the club were in the Championship, may have a point to prove.

But Posh midfielder George Boyd disagrees.



DARREN FERGUSON

He said: "I am very confident about playing in the Championship, I know I can play at this level and I showed that last time.

"As a team we will show everyone we are good enough to stay in this league. In fact we are looking forward to proving that to everyone.

"If anything it will be harder this time around because of the teams that have been relegated from the Premier League like Birmingham and West Ham.

"The division was full of big teams anyway before those teams came down.

"There is not one easy game in our fixture list, but that is what is so exciting about this season."

It has been a relatively quiet summer at London Road.

There has been the expected departure of star striker Craig Mackail-Smith, who moved to Brighton for £2.5m while there have been a handful of new recruits such as keeper Paul Jones and Manchester United trio – thanks, dad! – Nicky Ajose, Ryan Tunicliffe and Scott Wootton.

Ferguson will largely be working with the players who did him proud last season.

"We'd love to get two or three players who have played 200 or 300 games in the Championship," he admitted.

"But, believe me, it's not going to happen with wages they would demand."

Staying in the black

BRIAN McDermott faces a tough challenge as he tries to go one better with Reading this season.

The Royals boss managed to take his team from mid-table into the play-offs and then all the way to final before they were defeated by Swansea.

It was a remarkable achievement.

It will be made all the harder to repeat, let alone better, by the sale of former Saints defender Matt Mills for around £5m to Leicester.

McDermott has said that he doesn't expect to be able to spend any of that money as Reading run their budgets tightly.

"We saw it coming and it's the nature of how we run our club," said McDermott.

"It's unfortunate, but that's how we do things and we move on.

"We're running a business as well as a football club and we've done it this way for a number of years now.

"We have to make sure we stay in the black.

"We offered Matt a new deal and tried to keep him, but he made the decision to talk to Leicester.

"I'll conduct business if it's good, in our price range and makes the books balance, then we may have an interest. I've been here for 11 years now and that's what we've been doing during that time.

MICHAIL ANTONIO

"We want players who want to come and play for Reading. That's no different."

McDermott this week signed South African international defender Bongani Khumalo on a season-long loan from Tottenham.

Reading have at least done well to hold on to many of their other star names who were linked with moves in the immediate aftermath of the Wembley defeat.

If reports were to have been believed then there could have been something of an exodus from the Madjeski Stadium but that appears, for now at least, to have been avoided.

Star striker Shane Long – 25 goals last season – continues to be linked with a Premiership move, though.

Though additions have been hard to come by, McDermott does have the basis of a highly talented and experienced squad and one that goes into the season with nothing to fear.

That is certainly the view of striker Simon Church.

"It was hard to get over the game at Wembley straight away," said the Welsh international.

"But it's now time to put it to the back of our minds and move on from it.

"As soon as the fixtures came out I wanted to get going and I can't wait for the first game at home to Millwall."

Former Saints loanee winger Michail Antonio will be hoping to figure more regularly – he was mainly used as a sub last season – while ex-Eastleigh striker Brett Williams will be eager to force his way into McDermott's first team plans at some stage in 2011/12.

READING

Ground: Madejski Stadium

Capacity: 24,200

Record attendance: 33,042 (Elm Park) v Brentford, FA Cup fifth round, Feb 1927.

Nickname: Royals

Last 10 seasons
01/02 2nd (League 1) P
02/03 4th (Champ)
03/04 9th
04/05 7th
05/06 1st P
06/07 8th (Prem)
07/08 18th R
08/09 4th (Champ)
09/10 9th
10/11 5th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Shane Long 21, Ian Harte 11, Noel Hunt 10, Jimmy Kebe 9, Simon Church 5, Hal Robson-Kanu 5

In: Bongani Khumalo (Tottenham, loan).

Out: Scott Davies (Crawley, free), Ivar Ingimarsson (Ipswich, free), Matt Mills (Leicester, £5m)

Last 10 managers
Ian Porterfield (Nov 89 - Mar 91)
Mark McGhee (May 91 - Dec 94)
Mick Gooding (Jan 95 - May 97)
Jimmy Quinn (Jan 95 - May 97)
Terry Bullivant (Jun 97 - Mar 98)
Tommy Burns (Mar 98 - Sep 99)
Alan Pardew (Oct 99 - Sep 03)
Steve Coppell (Oct 03 - May 09)
Brendan Rodgers (Jun 09 - Dec 09)
Brian McDermott (Dec 09 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Ricky Gervais (comedian, actor), Leo Sayer (singer), Kate Winslett (actress).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 1 Reading 1 (McGoldrick)
Reading 1 Saints 2 (Wright-Phillips 2)

Played for both Saints and Royals
Michail Antonio, Bill Beaney, Noel Bedford, Paul Bennett, Nicholas Bignall, Jason Bowen, Kevin Dawtry, Kerry Dixon, Pat Earles, Alfred Freeman, Michael Gilkes, Thomas Jenkins, Ian Juryeff, Paul Moody, Matt Mills, Steven Moran, Eric Nixon, Grzegorz Rasiak, Matthew Richardson, Andrew Rogers, George Shipley, Mark Whitlock, Steve Wood

COUNTDOWN TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

WATFORD

Ground: Vicarage Road

Capacity: 19,900

Record attendance: 34,099 v Manchester United, FA Cup fourth round replay, Feb 1969.

Nickname: Hornets

Last 10 seasons
01/02 14th (Champ)
02/03 13th
03/04 16th
04/05 18th
05/06 3rd P*
06/07 20th (Prem) R
07/08 6th (Champ)
08/09 13th
09/10 16th
10/11 14th

Top league scorers 2010/11
Danny Graham 24, Marvin Sordell 12, John Eustace 6, Martin Taylor 6, Jordan Mutch 5, Will Buckley 4, Don Cowie 4, Andreas Weimann 4

In: David Murfin (Scunthorpe, free), Mark Yeates (Sheffield United, undisclosed), Chris Iwelumo (Burnley, undisclosed)

Out: Liam Henderson (York City, free), Will Buckley (Brighton, £1m), Danny Graham (Swansea, undisclosed), Nathan Ellington (Ipswich, free), Matt Sadler (Walsall, free), Don Cowie (Cardiff, free)

Last 10 managers
Steve Perryman (Nov 90 - Jul 93)
Kenny Jackett (Aug 93 - Jun 97)
Glenn Roeder (Aug 93 - Feb 96)
Graham Taylor (Feb 96 - Jun 01)
Gianluca Viatti (Jun 01 - Jun 02)
Ray Lewington (Jul 02 - Mar 05)
Adrian Boothroyd (Mar 05 - Nov 08)
Brendan Rodgers (Nov 08 - Jun 09)
Malky Mackay (Jun 09 - Jun 11)
Sean Dyche (Jun 11 - Present)

Celebrity fans
Elton John (musician), Geri Halliwell (former Spice Girl).

Last time they met Saints 2008/2009
Saints 0 Watford 3
Watford 2 Saints 2 (Saeijs 2)

Played for both Saints and Hornets
Kerry Dixon, George Ephgrave, Charles Livesey, Carlton Palmer, Kevin Richardson, Neil Shipperley.

One more high ...?

CHRIS Iwelumo has scaled the highs and lows of football.

He has been promoted four times, reached the Premier League, and even been capped for his country.

But the 32-year-old has also been the butt of many a joke after his Scotland debut turned into something of a nightmare with a terrible miss against Norway which has been replayed again and again.

Now, though, he has joined Watford, recruited by rookie manager Sean Dyche, and eager to write another positive chapter in his story.

He said: "It's a great opportunity for me to come and achieve something – there's real ambition here and I'm just glad to be part of it.

"I'm excited and looking forward to it – there will be good times ahead.

"I have been speaking to the gaffer and he's so confident that you can feel the little goose bumps going. He wants to achieve something and I'm excited to be part of that.

"I've been very lucky in that I've had four promotions (including one with Wolves from the Championship in 2008/09) and I've played in the Premier League. I want to keep on achieving things.

"I want to keep on playing and scoring goals – but of course I've had some low points in my career.

"Everyone brings back my Scotland debut, but if anything it makes you stronger.

"There are many highs and lows in the game and you have to pick yourself up from them and get on with it.

"It's a short career and you have to do as much in the game as you possibly can do, so I have no regrets at the end of it. With the way I'm going, I'm not going to have any regrets."

Watford have lost a few key players over the summer but Dyche, who took over from Malky Mackay when he joined Cardiff, is hopeful the experienced players he recruits, like Iwelumo, will bridge the gaps left by last season's top scorer Danny Graham and winger Don Cowie.

"Chris will give the team an extra dimension, not just on the pitch but off it as well, with his mentality and his professionalism. It will rub off on others," he reflected.

"We have a lot of young talent here, and we have some great focal points and leaders in players like John Eustace and Martin Taylor.

"He can add to that experience, so in that sense it will be a really productive signing.

"True professionalism is very important, never more so than in the modern game.

"The key is to keep your eye well and truly on what it's about, not only achieving what's best for yourself but going into a team and helping them to achieve things."

FLASHBACK: Chris Iwelumo heads a goal for Charlton against Saints at St Mary's in 2007.

Tallest of fallen giants

IN a league of fallen giants, West Ham stand among the very tallest.

The Hammers dropped out of the top flight last season but, after the appointment of Sam Allardyce, are hoping to bounce straight back up.

It won't be easy – planning for a new season when you don't know whether you will still have star players such as Carlton Cole, Robert Green and Scott Parker makes life hard.

But signing Kevin Nolan, Matty Taylor and Abdoulaye Faye from Premiership clubs underlines their ambition for an immediate return to the Premier League.

"Without sounding too arrogant, my experience and my expertise as a manager that I've gained, particularly in the Premier League over the last ten years, will help me to bring the club together, to get a team spirit and a togetherness that is going to achieve the ultimate – to get promotion at the first time of asking," said Allardyce.

"As difficult a task as that is going to be, it can be achieved.

"At a club the size of West Ham, it needs to be done as quickly as possible because the long-term goal is the Olympic Stadium and the team must be back in the Premier when it is going to move into that great venue.

"So, I've got to instill a bit of discipline, a little bit of magic and creativity and certainly a bond between the players and the staff to drive ourselves on through what is a very difficult season.

"Lots of big teams are spending lots of money aside from ourselves to try to achieve that goal."

Allardyce does respect the size of the challenge ahead of him.

"It won't be an easy task," he reflected.

"I've got to try to really get rid of the hangover that relegation brings and transform that as quickly as I possibly can into a positive mental attitude.

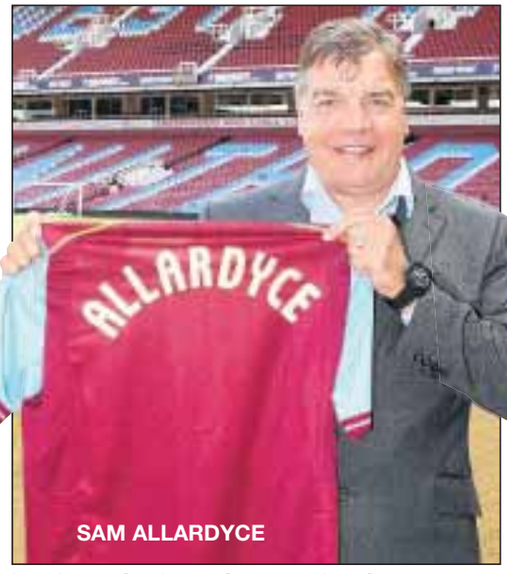
"We'll look at moving some players on because their desire is to want to play in the Premier.

"It suits us as well to lose that financial commitment because the drastic loss in revenue is what we all have to face at West Ham, first and foremost.

"Certainly the owners have got to really back-up with their own money to try to get us back into the Premier League."

West Ham have had fairly recent experience of the second tier.

They spent two seasons in the Championship last time following relegation in 2002/03 before winning the play-off final under Alan Pardew in 2005.



SAM ALLARDYCE

WEST HAM

Ground: Upton Park

Capacity: 35,333

Record attendance: 42,322 v Tottenham Hotspur, First Division, Oct 1970.

Nickname: Hammers

Last 10 seasons
01/02 7th (Prem)
02/03 18th R
03/04 4th (Champ)
04/05 6th P
05/06 9th (Prem)
06/07 15th
07/08 10th
08/09 9th
09/10 17th
10/11 20th R

Top league scorers 2010/11
Demba Ba 7, Frederic Piquionne 6, Carton Cole 5, Scott Parker 5, Mark Noble 4, Victor Obina 3

In: Abdoulaye Faye (Stoke City, free), Kevin Nolan (Newcastle, free), Matt Taylor (Bolton Wanderers, £2.2m)

Out: Demba Ba (Newcastle, free), Danny Gabbidon (QPR), free), Kieron Dyer (QPR, free).

Last 10 managers
John Lyall (Aug 74-Jun 89)
Lou Macari (Jul 89-Feb 90)
Billy Bonds (Feb 90-Aug 94)
Harry Redknapp (Aug 95-May 01)
Glenn Roeder (May 01-Apr 03)
Alan Pardew (Oct 03-Dec 06)
Alan Curbishley (Dec 06-Sep 08)
Gianfranco Zola (Sep 08-May 10)
Avram Grant (Jun 10-May 11)
Sam Allardyce (Jun 11 -)

Celebrity fans
Frank Bruno (former boxer), Graham Gooch (former cricketer), Steve Harris (rock bassist, Iron Maiden bassist), Kiera Knightly (actress), Ray Winstone (actor).

Last time they met Saints 2002/2003
Saints 1 West Ham 1 (Beattie)
West Ham 0 Saints 1 (Beattie)

Played for both Saints and Hammers
Paul Allen, Eyal Berkovic, Iain Dowie, Richard Hall, Terry Hurlock, Thomas Jenkins, Joe Kirkup, Charles Livesey, David Speedie, Louis Boa Morte, Nigel Quashie.

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05 Sept : Cornish Delight 5 day	£259
05 Sept : North Somerset Coast & Railways 5 day	£287
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09 Sept : Where There's Brass 5 day	£284
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10 Sept : Jersey, Guernsey & Sark 7 day	£659
10 Sept : Scotland - Dunoon & Bute 8 day	£528
10 Sept : Isle of Wight 8 day	£515
11 & 25 Sept : Blackpool Illuminations 6 day	£299
11 Sept : Gardens of Cornwall 8 day	£479
11 Sept : Peak District & Derbyshire 5 day	£329
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12 Sept : Torquay Steam & Sail 5 day	£257

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Non-league News

A New start

DAN Newman, who recently left Downton for Sydenhams Premier neighbours Bemerton, scored in the Harlequins' 2-0 friendly win over Shrewton United. Former Robins skipper Newman netted from close range midway through the first half, leaving the impressive Harry Crisp to round off victory 12 minutes from time.

McBean deal

EX-EASTLEIGH loan striker Warren McBean has joined Steve King's revolution at Ryman Premier club Lewes.

The well-travelled McBean is one of many new attacking options at The Dripping Pan. He joins summer signings Michael Malcolm from Farnborough, ex-Havant frontman Paul Booth and Bedford's Ian Draycott in the fight for places.

Street moves

SYDENHAMS One outfit Andover New Street have brought in Robbie Henderson from Whitchurch United, Luke Soulby from Andover, Joshua Taylor from Fleet Town and Alex Thompson from Stockbridge.
Also new in are a trio of lads from the Reading League – Adam Colaco, George Dallada and Robby Joe Duodo.

Non-league Football

DON'T BLAME JOHN SMITH: Ex-Andover boss Andy Leader.

DARK

ANDY Leader says it's wrong to point the finger of blame at former chairman John Smith for the collapse of Andover Football Club.

Having managed the north Hampshire team for the last two seasons, Leader insists the root of the Lions' problems runs much deeper.

The county's non-League community was reeling this week when Andover pulled the plug on 128 years of football "due to continuing financial restraints" which meant the cost of staging Southern League football was no longer viable.

The move followed the shock resignation of Smith's successor, former Winchester City man Martin Moody, less than a month after he had been elected chairman.

It is understood that when he accepted the post Moody was not aware of the extent of the club's debts.

Wendy Gee
wendy.gee@dailyecho.co.uk
NON-LEAGUE REPORTER

Explaining his sudden departure, Moody said: "During the last three weeks many ghosts have appeared out of cupboards to a point where I am not prepared to put my name as chairman as I find this totally unacceptable and will not work in this kind of environment."

Irate and upset

Some frustrated Lions fans blame Smith and/or Moody for the club's demise, but Leader said: "The problems began long before John took over as chairman. If he hadn't stepped in when he did, this would have happened sooner.

"I understand people being irate and upset, but they could channel their views better than criticising the people who were

What they said...

ANDOVER FC DIRECTORS

"The Board of Directors on behalf of the shareholders at Andover FC regret that due to continuing financial restraints they have been forced with immediate effect to dissolve Andover Football Club Ltd.

"After much deliberation the decision was made as it was agreed that the cost of staging Southern League Football was no longer viable. Therefore resignations have been tendered to the Evo-Stik Southern League, the Wyvern League and also to the FA and Hampshire and North Hants FAs.

"Professional advice will now be sought as to the recommended course of action regarding administration, debtors etc.

"It is hoped that in the near future Andover FC can be resurrected to play at a more appropriate level to continue the club's name which has been synonymous with the town since 1883."

JOHN SMITH (ANDOVER FC VICE-CHAIRMAN AND COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR)

"Ever since we moved from the town centre up to The Portway Stadium (in 1989), we've struggled with the gates.

"We can't open seven days a week like the old Walled Meadow club used to because no one is going to go up to an industrial estate to have a few drinks at night. It is a very sad state.

"Non-League football is all about money, unfortunately. You haven't got local players that come and play for nothing."

ANDY LEADER (FORMER TEAM BOSS)

"I'm gobsmacked and disappointed the club has folded after people put so much work in.

"For many years Andover had benefactors, but when they stepped away the club had to stand on its own two feet. But, with lack of sponsorship and interest and today's economy, it wasn't to be. It's sad for the club and sad for football.

"I'd like to think Andover FC will regroup one day and come back stronger for it.

"It can be done. Just look at Newbury. The bailiffs came in and the club stayed dormant for quite a while. But they reformed and they're back playing in a league (the Hellenic) again now."

ANDY DARNTON (MANAGER-IN-WAITING)

"It's really sad – and ironic because I'd just been give the nod for the manager's job and had seven new players lined up to come in.

"It was difficult last season with no budget and the former chairman John Smith said we couldn't survive without a new investor.

"When Martin Moody came in things looking promising. I thought this year would be different.

"There was a reasonable budget and I was looking forward to bringing some new players in and pushing the club on.

"But then skeletons came out of the cupboard and Martin pulled out because he didn't want to inherit debt."

DAVE DIAPER (MANAGER OF LEAGUE RIVALS SHOLING)

"It's a real shame.

"I was a bit surprised Andover wanted to stay in the Southern League.

"You've got to have your house in order and you get a gut feeling through the year if things aren't right. Maybe they stayed at this level too long and should have made a decision earlier to go back to the Wessex League. It's better competing at a level you can sustain.

"The recession is hitting a lot of clubs hard and I don't doubt there will more (going under) before the end of the season."

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VOUCHER

MORE NON LEAGUE ON PAGES 44-45 AND 48

Non-league Football

DAYS AT THE PORTWAY

left to pick up the pieces.

"John Smith worked his socks off for the club, but the foundations weren't there and he didn't have enough people to help him.

"It's no good criticising one individual – and it's not the new regime's fault either.

"People forget how difficult it is to run a grass roots club. The outgoings are unbelievable and, unless you've got sufficient people putting in time at a cost to themselves, it becomes impossible to sustain."

Just a decade ago, it was all so different for Andover.

Backed by money man Ken Cunningham-Brown, the Lions became Wessex League champions for the first time in their history, scoring a club record 153 goals.

A memorable 2000/01 season culminated in Hampshire FA Senior Cup glory, beating Havant & Waterlooville 2-0 The Dell.

The Lions roared to a League/League Cup/Russell Cotes treble the following year but, for all that success, gates failed to pick up significantly and they lurched towards extinction in the summer of 2002 when Cunningham-Brown resigned after more than ten years at the helm.

They were only saved when a group of supporters purchased the Portway lease. But, despite promotion back to the Southern League in 2006, the Lions have been in steady decline ever since.

They reached a new low last season when rabbits' burrows wrecked the pitch and several home matches were postponed.

Trials and tribulations

Unable to recover, the Lions endured a season of struggle, failing to win a single home game and winding up bottom of the Southern One South & West.

Leader stayed loyal through all those trials and tribulations and only stood down because a change of management seemed inevitable when the new chairman came in.

Moody's appointment was preceded by the arrival of ex-Winchester boss Steve Moss as Leader's successor. But that came to a sudden end when Moss accepted a full-time coaching job at Rotherham United earlier this month.

Until last weekend's shock turn of events, the team boss's job had looked destined to go to Leader's former right-hand man Andy Darnton. But, just as the former Bashley defender was given the nod, the club collapsed from under him.

"I'd been in contact with Darts and I was pleased because it looked like he'd get the job," said Leader.

"What's happened to the club is very sad. I feel gob-smacked and disappointed because of all the hard work people put in.

"I had two years of struggle there with no budget, but we were brave enough to keep it afloat and do the best we could with nothing.

"If I'd walked away last season, the club would have folded then, but it's not in my make-up. In my heart of hearts, I still felt Andover had potential if they could get their house in order.

"We stuck with it all the way through and, although we finished bottom, we didn't take the club down (due to a reprieve from relegation) and we won the North Hants Cup, the club's first silverware in years.

"But I couldn't stop what was happening behind the scenes.

"You can do so much as manager, but you don't get to the nitty-gritty of the boardroom and the books."

FLASHBACK: Ken Cunningham-Brown (manager, above left), John Cunningham-Brown (Chairman) and Mick Burford (assistant manager) receive a Daily Echo Wessex League club of the month award in 2001. Andover boss Ken Cunningham-Brown, right, receives his Wessex League manager of the month award from league secretary Tom Lindon in 1999. Below: The Portway.

GOT A NON LEAGUE STORY? EMAIL wendy.gee@dailyecho.co.uk

Non-league News

Fareham fill Lindsey void

FAREHAM Town have atoned for the loss of top gun Graham Lindsey to Winchester City by signing striker Robbie Tambling from Hayling United.

Tambling, who has Southern League experience with Gosport Borough, top-scored for the Humbugs last season with 11 league goals from just 19 starts in the Sydenhams Premier.

TAMBLING

"In the two friendlies he's been involved with Robbie has already scored twice. He looks a more than able replacement for Graham Lindsey," said a Town spokesman.

Fareham – who finished eighth in the Premier last season – have also been boosted by news that defenders Ollie Warren and John Stock and midfielder Jon Stevens have re-signed for 2011/12.

Gary Fitz bill for Eastleigh

NINETEEN-year-old Gary Fitzehorswell netted for a young Easteigh Reserves side at North Leigh last Saturday.

It was the teenager's second goal for the Spitfires since arriving on trial from Lyndhurst.

Fitzehorswell's goal was a mere consolation in the Spitfires' 5-1 defeat at Eynsham Park.

Matt Taylor bagged a hat-trick for the Southern One South & West hosts, backed by singles from Lee Mills and Joe Fullerton.

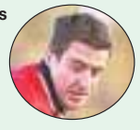
Former Saints winger Josh Dutton-Black, who made one Setanta Shield appearance for Eastleigh in 2008, was included in the North Leigh line-up.

Another very young Eastleigh side, under the managerial reins of Danny Smith, lost 2-0 to AFC Bournemouth's under-18s at the club's Hardmoor training ground.

Rush rocket

VINCE Rusher netted his first goal for new club Downton in a deserved 1-1 draw at Bashley last Saturday.

The former Andover and Eastleigh hitman, signed from Andover New Street, struck a 25-yarder four minutes into the second half. It cancelled Mark Gamble's first-half opener for the Foresters.



RUSHER

Downton followed up Saturday's draw with a 2-1 mid-week win over a young Eastleigh Reserves side at Wick Lane. Liam Robinson put the Spitfires ahead following a swift counter-attack from a Downton corner, but the Robins hit back through Ollie Hoare and Simon Nelson.

Non-league Football

Non-league News

Football feast deal

GROUNDHOPPERS are being encouraged to visit Salisbury next month to take in two key early-season fixtures. Sydenhams Premier newcomers Downton have brought forward their derby with Laverstock & Ford on Bank Holiday Monday, August 29, to a noon kick-off.

It will enable fans to hop straight across to the afternoon's Blue Square Bet South fixture between Salisbury City and old foe Havant & Waterlooville.

The groundhoppers' football feast is being promoted by *Sport4Salisbury.com* which has helped arrange a special discount for non-League followers.

Those attending the Downtown v Laverstock match at Wick Lane will be handed a voucher entitling the holder to £1 off the admission price at Salisbury's Raymond McEnhill Stadium later that day.

Local taxi firm Salisbury Value Cars have agreed to lay on transport to ferry supporters from Downton to Salisbury at a special rate of £1 per person.

Sport4Salisbury's Mike Turner, who is also Downton's new secretary, explained: "Salisbury v Havant is always a tasty encounter and should attract a decent crowd.

"Had Downton kicked off at the same time, our gate would almost certainly be affected.

"But thanks to the support and co-operation of the Downton board and management, Laverstock & Ford, the Sydenhams Wessex League and the generosity of Salisbury City and Value Cabs, supporters in the district can now enjoy a double header."

Bowles trial

AFC BOURNEMOUTH'S interest in Dorchester Town defender Gary Bowles comes as no surprise to the Blue Square Bet South club's assistant manager Phil Simkin.

The 22-year-old turned out for the Cherries in their recent 2-2 draw at Winchester City and did enough to be invited to train with the npower League One outfit this week.

"He is an exceptionally talented player," said Simkin. "Technically he is probably the best equipped in our team. People often don't realise how good he really is."

Matt step up

FORMER AFC Bournemouth apprentice Matt Vokes has signed for Evo-Stik Southern Premier Division outfit Bashley.

Vokes, younger brother of Wolves' ex-Dean Court star Sam, is a versatile player who cut his teeth in the Cherries youth ranks.

He was given a taste of senior football in the Wessex League with Brockenhurst last term and now jumps two steps up the non-League ladder with Bash.

Loyalty cheers Mew

DEPARTED: Freddie Toomer has joined Blackfield but boss Wayne Mew, inset, has been encouraged by those that have stayed loyal to Romsey.

ROMSEY Town boss Wayne Mew has praised the loyalty of his players – including those who have left the club this summer.

Without a budget to work with, Mew knew it would be nigh on impossible to keep the whole of last season's squad intact.

So it was no great surprise when goalkeeper Freddie Toomer, James Embree and Ashley 'Woody' Johnson were tempted away by three of the clubs expected to challenge for Sydenhams Premier honours this term.

Embree has joined promotion-hungry Winchester City, while Salisbury City youth graduate Johnson – a player not even known in Wessex circles this time last year – has joined the host of summer arrivals at Blackfield & Langley.

And, having cut his ties with parent club Eastleigh, Toomer has pitched up with last season's league runners-up Bemerton Heath Harlequins.

"We still don't have a budget which means no money to pay players, so this was always going to happen," said Mew. "It would be nice if some of these club owners would put their money into Romsey rather than keep taking our players to their clubs!"

Romsey's losses would have been greater had top gun Simon De'Ath, Ryan Long, Jake Long and Ross Gregory accepted the lucrative offers that came their way, but all four opted to remain at the Bypass Ground.

"They were offered a lot by Winchester and/or Blackfield, but they haven't gone," said Mew.

"They had the chance of a signing-on fee as well as a weekly wage but have decided to stay.

"That loyalty is really pleasing. It shows that, even without money, there's still a lot to enjoy at Romsey.

"Even the players who have left texted and begged me to try and get the money to keep them.

"Their hearts are at Romsey, but their wallets are at other clubs and I can understand why.

"When you're offered £50-£60 a week plus win bonuses, it's a lot to turn down particularly for lads who haven't got a lot of work."

Steve Hollick, goalkeeping coach with Totton & Eling last season, will fill the void left by Toomer.

Mew has also signed young midfielder Luke Dempsey from Sholing and Callum Stanley, a striker/wideman formerly with New Milton.

Frontman Ben White, on Alton Town's books last term, is also in training with Romsey but has yet to sign.

"We've lost two or three and brought two or three in, so I'm expecting a similar season to last year," said Mew, who picked up the reins from Glenn Burnett last summer and steered Town to 16th-place.

But the difference then was that he had to hurriedly build a side from scratch and strengthen it during the course of the season.

"Last year we didn't even have a squad to start with, so we're in a much better position now," said Mew.

"We could always do with more, of course, and we're trying our best to get a budget in place.

"If we had a budget, the majority of lads we've lost would have stayed and others would have signed for us.

"I tried to get (striker) Darren Morris from Sholing, but even Fawley were able to offer him money which is a bit frustrating."

● OF the money that has been available to Romsey Town this summer, the bulk has been spent on improving their Bypass Ground home.

The central section of the pitch has been dug up and re-laid, the stand, hospitality suite and dressing rooms have been given a lick of paint and Town plan to put a new roof on the clubhouse.

"We're trying to get the ground up to a reasonable standard as well as the team," manager Wayne Mew explained.

"We don't want to build a side capable of going out and winning things if we don't have a decent ground to go with it.

"The ground has been let go a bit over the years and we're trying to get it all up together side by side with the squad."

● The demise of Andover FC has left Romsey without a pre-season friendly fixture on August 6).

The pitch and officials have been booked at the Bypass Ground, now all they need is opposition.

TURN TO BACK PAGE FOR MORE NON-LEAGUE

Non-league Football

Star signing won't be on team sheet

CO-BOSS Danny Bowers rates Ian Jarvis the best of GE Hamble's summer signings.

But unlike his striker son Ashley, Jarvis's name will not be found on the Planemakers' team sheet.

It will be listed on the club officials' page in the matchday programme under the title 'commercial manager.'

"We've made Ashley's dad commercial manager and what he's done is unbelievable," said Bowers.

"He's generated so much interest in the club and is bringing in sponsorship.

"He's redesigned the programme and he's even got a company in Liverpool to advertise with us with a hoarding round our pitch.

"It's amazing the people he's getting involved with Hamble. I can't believe how much he's done.

"All clubs need people like him."

Another welcome piece of good news for the Planemakers is that Matt Newbold is back as secretary.

He replaces Ward Puddle, who has decided to take a break from football administration.

"Matt coming back is fantastic news. In fact it's been a fantastic summer for the club," smiled Bowers.

"It feels like we've taken some massive steps forward off the pitch.

"We've got another three members on the committee and, for a club of our size, it all helps.

"There are a lot more people prepared to help out behind the scenes."

Bowers, pictured left, himself feels reinvigorated and has even postponed a family holiday to get preparation just right for the upcoming Sydenhams Premier campaign.

He will again be supported by his trusty sidekick Paul Cotton and coaches Dave Lewis and Tim Middleton.

Not only has veteran midfielder Lewis been putting the players through their paces, but he has kept himself in tip-top shape and could well be challenging for a first-team place – aged 40!

"It pains me to say this, but Dave played 90 minutes at left-back against Andover in a friendly and was outstanding," said Bowers.

"He's in the same mould as (Poole Town's) Taffy Richardson. He runs six miles every couple of days and keeps himself in really good shape.

"He'll push our midfield lads and keep (left-back) Matt Troon on his toes."

Wendy Gee
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NON-LEAGUE REPORTER

STILL ON OPPOSITE SIDES: Hamble's Jamie Musselwhite, left, and Danny Horrell.

Danny plugs backline holes

WITH 91 goals scored, Hamble ASSC were the third sharpest shooters behind Poole and Winchester in the Sydenhams Premier Division last term.

But their careless habit of leaving the back door open meant they conceded an over-generous 75.

All things considered, finishing 12th on their return to the Wessex top-flight was no mean achievement for the Planemakers, who will this season go under the new name of GE Hamble.

But co-manager Danny Bowers knows they must find some extra defensive steel if they are to challenge the likes of Bemerton, Winchester and Brading in what he suspects will be a very open title race.

From the moment last season's 60-plus goal partnership of Jamie Musselwhite and Ashley Jarvis penned new 12-month deals, Bowers was confident of his side's attacking prospects for 2011/12.

But tightening up defence was to prove a trickier proposition with his two main targets, Danny Horrell of Moneyfields and Pete Castle of Gosport Borough, snapped up by two clubs not usually noted for their financial muscle.

Castle has signed for former Planemakers reserve team bosses Stuart and Matt Hussey at Lymington Town, while Horrell is joining his old Moneyfields teammate Warren Hunt at Blackfield.

"I went after Danny Horrell and we were blown out of the water moneywise," Bowers revealed.

"I also met up with Pete Castle twice, but there was a big contrast between what Hamble and Lymington could offer him.

"Pete actually said it was a tough decision because both clubs were very similar in what we spoke about, which I took as a compliment.

"But I do understand that a lad of his calibre would have to take a massive drop from what he's used to to join us."

Bowers successfully turned his sights to Fareham's Lee Wood and ex-Gosport and Havant & Waterlooville defender Dan Turner, who finished last season with Hayling United.

Turner, in particular, has shone in pre-season with Bowers admitting: "I've never seen a centre half so calm and collected. He's been outstanding.

"Also, Scott Gilham's still here and Lloyd Webber is the lightest and fittest he's been in six or seven years, so we've now got four quality centre halves.

"Plus there's Sam Doswell, who plays left-back or centre-back. He did pre-season at Sutton but he's training with us again now.

"We had to strengthen at the back. Lloyd missed 20-odd games last season through injury and we struggled without him."

Hamble have also recruited ex-BAT and Woking midfielder Ian Proctor and ex-Sholing frontman Dougie Rowe from Winchester City.

And, in fit-again former Havant & Waterlooville, Andover and Gosport midfielder Lewis Fennemore they have a virtual new signing.

"Lewis played left wing for us towards the end of last season and he wasn't fit, but he's worked really hard," said Bowers.

"We've had him playing in central midfield in the friendlies and now he looks like a Conference player.

"Dave Lewis and Tim Middleton have run the players hard. After underperforming last season, the lads are determined to get themselves in peak condition.

"We've now got the strongest squad we've ever had at this level."

Long-serving keeper Nick O'Donnell is back at Follands Park after spells at Brockenhurst and Fareham.

NON-LEAGUE PREVIEWS APPEAR EVERY FRIDAY IN THE DAILY ECHO

Non-league News

EASTLEIGH and AFC Totton will dive straight into action when the new Wyvern Combination League kicks off on Saturday, August 20.

The Spitfires begin their Premier Division campaign away at Bemerton Heath Harlequins, while Totton hit the road to Fleet Town.

Sholing's second string – winners of last season's Sydenhams Combination crown – start at Gosport Borough on August 24.

WYVERN COMBINATION LEAGUE
August fixtures –
Saturday, August 20
Premier Division: Bemerton HH v Eastleigh, Fleet Town v AFC Totton, Newport IoW v Dorchester Town.
Division One West: Brockenhurst v Fawley AFC, Ringwood Town v Romsey Town.
Division One East: Fareham Town v Alresford Town, Hayling Utd v GE Hamble, Horndean v Tadley Calleva.
Tuesday, August 23
Division One East: Whitchurch Utd v Winchester City.
Wednesday, August 24
Premier Division: Gosport Borough v Sholing, Moneyfields v Poole Town, Wimborne Town v Bashley.
Division One West: Downton v Hythe & Dibden, Laverstock & Ford v Lymington Town, Totton & Eling v Verwood Town.
Division One East: Petersfield Town v Alton Town
Saturday, August 27
Premier Division: AFC Totton v Bemerton HH, Fleet Town v Christchurch, Newport IoW v Poole Town, Wimborne Town v Moneyfields,
Division One West: East Cowes Vics v Downton, Totton & Eling v Laverstock & Ford
Division One East: Fareham Town v Petersfield, Hayling Utd v Winchester City, Horndean v GE Hamble.
Tuesday, August 30
Premier Division: Dorchester Town v Sholing.
Division One West: Romsey Town v Fawley AFC
Wednesday, August 31
Division One West: Brockenhurst v Hythe & Dibden, Verwood v Lymington Town.
Division One East: Tadley Calleva v Alresford Tn.

NEW-LOOK: AFC Totton's home and away kits for 2011/12.

Stags follow Saints' lead

AFC Totton are taking a leaf out of Saints' book by turning white for their 125th anniversary season.

Instead of donning their familiar blue kit for their debut Evo-Stik Southern League Premier Division campaign, Stuart Ritchie's men will be sporting a new look of white shirts, navy shorts and white socks.

The new colour scheme – to be worn for one season only – does not stretch back as far as 1886 when the old Totton Football Club became founder members of the Hampshire FA.

It recreates the strip worn when AFC Totton was born of an amalgamation between Totton FC and Totton Athletic in 1975.

The Stags' away strip for 2011/12 is all yellow.

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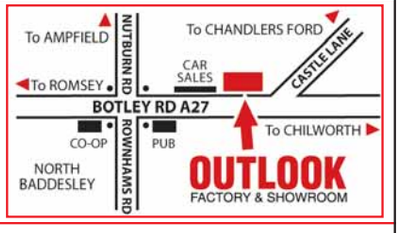

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Yeovil 2 Saints 2: See pages 20-21 for match reporrt

BACK IN THE OLD ROUTINE: Adam Lallana, pictured left, runs at the Yeovil defence while, above, Jose Fonte wins a header. *Daily Echo pictures by Chris Moorhouse*

● **For full match analysis and reaction, don't miss Monday's Daily Echo.**

WAITING GAME FOR BOSS BAIRD

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NON-LEAGUE REPORTER

Green targeted in bid to beef up competition for No1 spot

EASTLEIGH boss Ian Baird wants former Bristol Rovers goalkeeper Mike Green to provide competition for Gareth Barfoot this season.

The 22-year-old was outstanding in Tuesday's 2-1 friendly victory at Sholing, making a string of important saves to keep the Southern One South & West hosts at bay.

Baird, pictured right, makes no secret of his admiration for the 6ft 1in stopper, but Green is also having trials with npower League Two club Cheltenham Town and could yet return to the Football League ranks.

Speaking after the Sholing game, Baird said: "Michael did very well. He had an excellent game and he's got a very good attitude.

"I really want to sign a keeper, but it's a bit of a waiting game at the moment.

"Michael's still on trial at Cheltenham and, once again, there's the financial aspect to consider."

Bristol-born Green, a lifelong Rovers supporter, was one of five Filton College scholars awarded a professional contract by The Pirates in the summer of 2006.

He was a regular member of Rovers' reserve team for three seasons and made the bench for the Johnstone's Paint Trophy final at the Millennium Stadium and play-off final at Wembley in 2006/07.

He had loan spells with Mangotsfield United and Clevedon Town and spent the entire 2009/10 season with Gloucester City before making his League debut for Rovers in a 1-1 League One draw at Oldham Athletic last September.

In May he was one of 17 players released by the Pirates following relegation to League Two. He had played just four times for the first team – twice in League One, once in the FA Cup and once in the Carling Cup.

Earlier this month Green had trials with Oxford United who are looking for back-up for ex-Salisbury City stopper Ryan Clarke.

He has also made three pre-season appearances for Cheltenham, but it's been reported that Robins boss Mark Yates has a young loan keeper lined up from a Premier League club.

Green was one of several trialists in action for Eastleigh at Sholing.

Baird took another look at Portsmouth's Billy Tsovolos at right-back, while former Stockport County defender/midfielder Jordan Rose partnered Tom Jordan in central defence.

The Spitfires also ran the rule over Jersey-born ex-Saints and Salisbury winger Jack Boyle, who played on the right of a midfield four.

Home-grown youngsters Ben Wilson, Sam Wilson and Liam Hibberd also featured as did former Salisbury and Forest Green midfielder Ryan O'Hara.

Eastleigh won the game thanks to two penalties from Jamie Slabber and Andrew White. Ex-Spitfire Barry Mason replied for Sholing.

Baird reflected: "For the neutral it was a good game.

"Sholing had the better chances and were probably the better side on the night. They've got a lot of experienced players at their level."

Eastleigh entertain Saints under-21s at the Silverlake Stadium next Wednesday (August 3, 7.45pm).

Flood of goals

FORMER Winchester and Salisbury City frontman Chris Flood scored twice for Dorchester Town in last Saturday's 3-1 friendly win over Blue Square Bet South rivals Thurrock.

It took the 21-year-old's pre-season goal tally to four and Magpies' boss Ashley Vickers has his fingers crossed that Flood will keep up the good work for the forthcoming league campaign.

"This will do his confidence the world of good and hopefully pay dividends for us," said Vickers.

"Chris brings a different dynamic to what we have had before and he creates problems for the opposition."

After breaking into senior football with Winchester as a 16-year-old, Flood moved into the professional ranks with QPR and Brentford before signing for Salisbury.

Crawley Town paid £10,000 for him last summer, but he had his contract cancelled by mutual consent in February and joined Dorchester after a successful loan.

Coach wanted

SYDENHAMS Wessex Premier club Hamworthy United are in urgent need of a goalkeeping coach to work alongside manager Simon Browne and his right-hand man Sean Bartlett. Anyone interested should contact Browne on 07866 187395.

Jinxed Lavvy

LAVERSTOCK & Ford's pre-season injury jinx struck again when central defender Matthew Scott suffered a broken leg playing against Amesbury Town.

Last season Lavvy lost another centre-back, Karl Tryhorn, to torn ligaments playing in a friendly against Forest Green Rovers. He was out for three months.

City fun day

SALISBURY City are hosting a family fun day at the Raymond McEnhill Stadium on Sunday, August 7, from 10am until mid afternoon.

Entry is free and events will include a junior mini football festival, a penalty shoot-out, bouncy castle and the launch of the new Whites away kit.

Highlight of the day will be a First Team v Supporters match.

Because of the likely demand there will be an auction for the outfield positions. The position of team manager is also available. To bid, supporters should visit the online auction page and register an account at *salisburycity-fc.co.uk/auction.*

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